LUCILE

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LUCILE.

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BY

OWEN MEREDITH.

"Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungallèd play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
Thus runs the world away."

Hamlet.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavored to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labor which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement and doubt, my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honored name with which I thus seek to associate it: nor yet because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honored by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts; feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own,— lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighboring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed task-work of maturer years; less confident indeed of your approval, but not less confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

LUCILE.

PART I.

CANTO I.

I.

LETTER FROM THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

"I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I am told
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old,
So long since you may have forgotten it now,
(When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers to grow,)
Your last words recorded a pledge — what you will —
A promise — the time is now come to fulfil.
The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,
I desire to receive from your hand. You discern
My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.
The distance to Serchon is short. I remain
A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, perchance,
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance
Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your place
At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.
I desire nothing more, and I trust you will feel
I desire nothing much.

"Your friend always,

"LUCILE."

II.

Now in May Fair, of course,— in the fair month of May —
When life is abundant, and busy, and gay:

When the markets of London are noisy about
Young ladies, and strawberries, — "only just out":
Fresh strawberries sold under all the house-eaves,
And young ladies on sale for the strawberry-leaves:
When cards, invitations, and three-corner'd notes
Fly about like white butterflies — gay little motes
In the sunbeam of Fashion; and even Blue Books
Take a heavy-wing'd flight, and grow busy as rooks;
And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,
Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,
Those lots which so often decide if our day
Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay)
Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or other
Than Cadmus, himself, put together, to bother
The heads of Hellenes; — I say, in the season
Of Fair May, in May Fair, there can be no reason
Why, when quietly munching your dry-toast and butter,
Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter
At the sight of a neat little letter, address'd
In a woman's handwriting, containing, half guess'd,
An odor of violets faint as the Spring,
And coquettishly seal'd with a small signet-ring.
But in Autumn, the season of sombre reflection,
When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection;
Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,
Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees,
Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,
A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,
A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,
Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,
The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,
And a letter may alter the plans we arranged
Over-night, for the slaughter of Time — a wild beast,
Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,
Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,
And more mischievous, too, than the Lynx or the Bear.

III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already
Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,
Lord Alfred was startled.
The month is September;
Time, morning; the scene at Bigorre; (pray remember
These facts, gentle reader, because I intend
To fling all the unities by at the end.)
He walk'd to the window. The morning was chill:
The brown woods were crisp'd in the cold on the hill:
The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind:
And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his mind,
Rose, and eddied around and around, as tho' teasing
Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleasing:
And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,
To himself more than once (vex'd in soul) sigh'd
. . . . . "Confound it!"

IV.

What the thoughts were which led to this bad interjection,
Sir, or Madam, I leave to your future detection;
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool!

LORD ALFRED.

Who?

JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do;
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,

To travel about with a woman in love, —
Unless she 's in love with himself.

ALFRED.

Indeed! why
Are you here then, dear Jack?

JOHN.

Can't you guess it?

ALFRED.

Not I.

JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that 's better to do.
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by myself.
That perverse, imperturbable, golden-hair'd elf —
Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me
Such a dance through these hills —

ALFRED.

Who, Matilda?

JOHN.

Yes! she,
Of course! who but she could contrive so to keep
One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four?

ALFRED.

What 's the matter?

JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more
I consider about it, the more it demands

An attention it does not deserve; and expands
Beyond the dimensions which ev'n crinoline,
When possess'd by a fair face and saucy Eighteen,
Is entitled to take in this very small star,
Already too crowded, as *I* think, by far.
You read Malthus and Sadler?

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

To what use,
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous abuse
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space
In this world? Mars, Apollo, Virorum! the case
Wholly passes my patience.

ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

JOHN.

Yours, Alfred?

ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide.

JOHN (*reading the letter*).

"*I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told*
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old —"
What is this?

ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you 'll know.

JOHN (*continues reading*).

"*When we parted, your last words recorded a vow —*
What you will" . . . .

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,
Of adventures and violets. Was it your hair
You promised a lock of?

ALFRED.

Read on. You 'll discern.

JOHN (*continues*).

"*Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return.*" . . .
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse than I guess'd;
I have my misgivings —

ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,
And advise.

JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I? . . .
(*continues*)
"*Miss Darcy, perchance,*
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance
Of her courtship." . . .
Egad! a romance, for my part,
I 'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

ALFRED.

Continue!

JOHN (*reading*).

"*And spare you one day from your place*
At her feet." . . .
Pray forgive me the passing grimace.
I wish you had MY place!
(*reads*)
"*I trust you will feel*
I desire nothing much. Your friend" . . .
Bless me! "*Lucile*"?
The Comtesse de Nevers?

ALFRED.

Yes.

JOHN.

What will you do?

ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

JOHN.

You can't go.

ALFRED.

I must.

JOHN.

And Matilda?

ALFRED.

Oh, that
You must manage!

JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.
In an hour the horses will be at the door,
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before
I have finish'd my breakfast, of course I receive
A message for "*dear Cousin John!*" . . . I must leave
At the jeweller's the bracelet which *you* broke last night;
I must call for the music. "Dear Alfred is right:
The black shawl looks best: *will* I change it? Of course
I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.
Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows what;
Will I see the dog-doctor?" Hang Beau! I will *not*.

ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

JOHN.

It is.

ALFRED.

Very well,
You must think —

JOHN.

What excuse will you make, tho'?

ALFRED.

Oh, tell
Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack! . . . the deuce!
Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's use?
Excuses are clothes which, when ask'd unawares,
Good Breeding to naked Necessity spares.
You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

JOHN.

My dear fellow,
Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

ALFRED.

You joke.

JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.
Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,
Before I extinguish forever the fire
Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light
Hope whisper'd her first fairy tales, to excite
The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn
Of my days where the twilights of life were first drawn
By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love:

In short, from the dead Past the gravestone to move;
Of the years long departed forever to take
One last look, one final farewell; to awake
The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,
And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack — a boy!

JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

ALFRED.

No! were it but
To make sure that the Past from the Future is shut,
It were worth the step back. Do you think we should live
With the living so lightly, and learn to survive
That wild moment in which to the grave and its gloom
We consign'd our heart's best, if the doors of the tomb
Were not lock'd with a key which Fate keeps for our sake?
If the dead could return, or the corpses awake?

JOHN.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up
A fill'd guest from the banquet, and drains off his cup
Sees the last lamp extinguish'd with cheerfulness, goes
Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.
But he who hath supp'd at the tables of kings,
And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things;
Who hath watch'd the wine flow, by himself but half tasted
Heard the music, and yet miss'd the tune; who hath wasted
One part of life's grand possibilities; — friend,
That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,
A blighted experience, a rancor within:
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

JOHN.

I see you remember the cynical story
Of that wicked old piece of Experience — a hoary
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed
(Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,
And observing, with no small amount of surprise,
Resignation and calm in the old sinner's eyes)
Ask'd if he had nothing that weigh'd on his mind:
"Well, . . . no," . . . says Lothario, "I think not. I find,
On reviewing my life, which in most things was pleasant,
I never neglected, when once it was present,
An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,
I have naught to regret"; . . . and so, smiling, his soul
Took its flight from this world.

ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,
Which is best?

JOHN.

Why, Regret.

ALFRED.

No; Remorse, Jack, of course;
For the one is related, be sure, to the other.
Regret is a spiteful old maid: but her brother,
Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet
Has been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack, hang Regret!

JOHN.

Bref! you mean, then, to go?

ALFRED.

Bref! I do.

JOHN.

One word . . . stay!
Are you really in love with Matilda?

ALFRED.

Love, eh?
What a question! Of course.

JOHN.

Were you really in love
With Madame de Nevers?

ALFRED.

What; Lucile? No, by Jove,
Never *really*.

JOHN.

She 's pretty?

ALFRED.

Decidedly so.
At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.
As soft, and as sallow as Autumn — with hair
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which the air
Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting sun.
Eyes — the wistful gazelle's; the fine foot of a fairy;
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, — white and airy;
A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows.
Something in her there was, set you thinking of those
Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic and deep
Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

JOHN.

Coquette?

ALFRED.

Not at all. 'T was her one fault. Not she!
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.
The heart of a man 's like that delicate weed
Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,
Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.
'T is a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

JOHN.

Women change so.

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,
I believe that, last year, the Comtesse de Nevers *
Was at Baden the rage — held an absolute court
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport
Of her subjects.

ALFRED.

Indeed!

JOHN.

When she broke off with you
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it?

* O Shakespeare! how couldst thou ask "What 's in a name?"
'T is the devil 's in it, when a bard has to frame
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French:
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench
All too far on that license which critics refuse,
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.
Yet, tho' faulty the union, in many a line,
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French heroine,
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,
Your forgiveness for this pair, the author invites,
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.

ALFRED.

Pooh!
Pray would you have had her dress always in black,
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?
Besides, 't was my fault the engagement was broken.

JOHN.

Most likely. How was it?

ALFRED.

The tale is soon spoken.
She bored me. I show'd it. She saw it. What next?
She reproach'd. I retorted. Of course she was vex'd.
I was vex'd that she was so. She sulk'd. So did I.
If I ask'd her to sing, she look'd ready to cry.
I was contrite, submissive. She soften'd. I harden'd.
At noon I was banish'd. At eve I was pardon'd.
She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.
I swore she talk'd nonsense. She sobb'd I talk'd treason.
In short, my dear fellow, 't was time, as you see,
Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'T was she
By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.
She released me. I linger'd. I linger'd, she thought,
With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,
The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,
And declare myself uncomprehended. And so
We parted. The rest of the story you know.

JOHN.

No, indeed.

ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not
Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.
You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdinando
Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.
I think that I acted exceedingly well,

Considering the time when this rupture befell,
For Paris was charming just then. It deranged
All my plans for the winter. I ask'd to be changed —
Wrote for Naples, then vacant — obtain'd it — and so
Join'd my new post at once; but scarce reach'd it, when lo!
My first news from Paris informs me Lucile
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.
I fly back. I find her recover'd, but yet
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret,
I ask to renew the engagement.

JOHN.

And she?

ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing!
We each keep our letters . . . a portrait . . . a ring . .
With a pledge to return them whenever the one
Or the other shall call for them back.

JOHN.

Pray go on.

ALFRED.

My story is finish'd. Of course I enjoin
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,
When Love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She obeys.
She goes out in the world; takes to dancing once more . .
A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.
I go back to my post, and collect (I must own
'T is a taste I had never before, my dear John)
Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigho! now, Jack,
You know all.

JOHN (*after a pause*).
You are really resolved to go back?

ALFRED.
Eh, where?

JOHN.
To that worst of all places — the past.
You remember Lot's wife?

ALFRED.
'T was a promise when last
We parted. My honor is pledged to it.

JOHN.
Well,
What is it you wish me to do?

ALFRED.
You must tell
Matilda, I meant to have call'd — to leave word —
To explain — but the time was so pressing —

JOHN.
My lord,
Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

ALFRED.
You wish then to break off my marriage?

JOHN.
No, no!
But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take
These letters.

ALFRED.
Not see? would you have me, then, break
A promise my honor is pledged to?

JOHN (*humming*).

"*Off, off,*

And away! said the stranger" . . .

ALFRED.

Oh, good! oh, you scoff!

JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

ALFRED.

At all things!

JOHN.

Indeed?

ALFRED.

Yes; I see that your heart is as dry as a reed:
That the dew of your youth is rubb'd off you: I see
You have no feeling left in you, even for me!
At honor you jest; you are cold as a stone
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have none;
You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight
About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight
Of such callous indifference, who could be calm?
I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm
That is left me in Gilead you 'll turn into gall.
Heartless, cold, unconcern'd . . .

JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all?
Well, then, listen to me! I presume when you made
Up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy, you weigh'd
All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,
Ere you finally settled the point. What remains

But to stick to your choice? You want money: 't is here.
A settled position: 't is yours. A career:
You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,
Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch
To be running away, on the eve of all this,
To a woman whom never for once did you miss
All these years since you left her? Who knows what may hap?
This letter — to *me* — is a palpable trap.
The woman has changed since you knew her. Perchance
She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.
When women begin to feel youth and their beauty
Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty
To let nothing else slip away unsecured
Which these, while they lasted, might once have procured.
Lucile 's a coquette to the end of her fingers,
I will stake my last farthing Perhaps the wish lingers
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover
To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover
What truth could not keep. 'T were a vengeance, no doubt —
A triumph; — but why must *you* bring it about?
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dream'd.

ALFRED.

But there 's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack.
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough
To make your betroth'd break off all in a huff.
Three days, do you say? But in three days who knows
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,
The one most abundantly furnish'd and found us,
And which, for that reason, we least care about,
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.
But advice, when 't is sought from a friend (though civility
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to indorse.
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack
A slender valise (the one small condescension
Which his final remonstrance obtain'd), whose dimension
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he
Shook hands with his friend and return'd to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turn'd,
Ere he lock'd up and quitted his chamber, discern'd
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright
In what Virgil has call'd 'Youth's purpureal light'
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).
He sigh'd as he look'd at her. Did he regret her?
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,
With their little impertinent look of surprise,
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow.—

"Discerned Matilda ride by with her cheek beaming bright"

I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky Way
Could turn into a woman, 't would look, I dare say,
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh
With which Alfred Vargrave now watch'd her ride by,
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,
As he turn'd from the window, he certainly sigh'd.

CANTO II.

I.

LETTER FROM LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE TO THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

"BIGORRE, Tuesday.

"Your note, Madam, reach'd me to-day, at Bigorre,
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Before
The night I shall be at Serchon — where a line,
If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive
My respects.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. VARGRAVE.

"I leave
In an hour."

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this,
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,
The reflections that journey gave rise to.
And here
(Because, without some such precaution, I fear
You might fail to distinguish them each from the rest
Of the world they belong to; whose captives are drest,
As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,
While the coat cut for Peter is pass'd on to Paul)
I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass
The persons I want, as before you they pass,
To label them broadly in plain black and white
On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he 's in sight,
I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er
When a man may in all things be all. We have more
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own
Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,
In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more
Than the 'live giant's eyesight avail'd to explore;
And in life's lengthen'd alphabet what used to be
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.

A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,
But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.
A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,
Till a More or Lavater step into his place:
Then the world turns and makes an admiring grimace.
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,
Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,
Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.
Now the men are so many and small, disengage
One man from the million to mark him, next moment
The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your comment;
And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)
'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,
We take the whole age for a hero, in want
Of a better; and still, in its favor, descant
On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find
In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

IV.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve
So little, because of the much they conceive.
With irresolute finger he knock'd at each one
Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.
His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,
And whatever he did he was sure to regret.
That target, discuss'd by the travellers of old,
Which to one appear'd argent, to one appear'd gold,
To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,
Appear'd in one moment both golden and argent.
The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,
May hope to achieve it before life be done;
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows
A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm
That crawls on in the dust to the definite term

Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more
Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,
In its limited vision, is happier far
Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fix'd by no friendly star
Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows
Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

V.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,
Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seem'd able
To dazzle, but not to illumine mankind.
A vigorous, various, versatile mind;
A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,
As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,
Vague, flitting, but on it forever impressing
The shape of some substance at which you stand guessing:
When you said, "All is worthless and weak here," behold!
Into sight on a sudden there seem'd to unfold
Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man:
When you said, "This is genius," the outlines grew wan.
And his life, though in all things so gifted and skill'd,
Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfill'd.

VI.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower
The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of his power
Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!
In that life one occasion, one moment, there was
When this earnestness might, with the life-sap of youth,
Lusty fruitage have borne in his manhood's full growth;
But it found him too soon, when his nature was still
The delicate toy of too pliant a will,
The boisterous wind of the world to resist,
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He miss'd
That occasion, too rathe in its advent.
Since then,
He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,
That intensity in him, which only left sore
The heart it disturb'd, to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,
In resigning the power he lack'd power to support,
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the court,
In his converse this man for self-comfort appeal'd
To a cynic denial of all he conceal'd
In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.
Words, however, are things: and the man who accords
To his language the license to outrage his soul,
Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.
And, therefore, he seem'd in the deeds of each day,
The light code proclaim'd on his lips to obey;
And, the slave of each whim, follow'd wilfully aught
That perchance fool'd the fancy, or flatter'd the thought.
Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirr'd themselves — strove to start
Into deeds — though deposed, in that Hades, his heart,
Like those antique Theogonies ruin'd and hurl'd
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the world,
Heaved, in earthquake, their heads the rent caverns above,
To trouble at times in the light court of Jove
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,
Of wrong'd rebel powers that own'd not their law.
For his sake, I am fain to believe that, if born
To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid scorn
Secured by the world's stern resistance), where strife,
Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to life,
He possibly might have contrived to attain
Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,

Had he been of his own house the first-born, each gift
Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift
A great name by a name's greatest uses.
But there
He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,
To life's great realities; part of no plan;
And if ever a nobler and happier man
He might hope to become, that alone could be when
With all that is real in life and in men
What was real in him should have been reconciled;
When each influence now from experience exiled
Should have seized on his being, combined with his nature,
And form'd, as by fusion, a new human creature:
As when those airy elements viewless to sight
(The amalgam of which, if our science be right,
The germ of this populous planet doth fold)
Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold!
Where a void seem'd before, there a substance appears,
From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres!

VII.

But the permanent cause why his life fail'd and miss'd
The full value of life was, — where man should resist
The world, which man's genius is call'd to command,
He gave way, less from lack of the power to withstand,
Than from lack of the resolute will to retain
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to gain
Let this character go in the old-fashion'd way,
With the moral thereof tightly tack'd to it. Say —
"Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 't will fly at his heels:
Let him fearlessly face it, 't will leave him alone:
But 't will fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone."

VIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,
Was unfolding from darkness and dreamland the lull
Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills
Watch'd, well-pleased, their fair slaves, the light, foam-footed
rills,
Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of their courts.
And gracefully, fashion a thousand sweet sports.
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeying far)
Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,
And brokenly humming an old opera strain,
And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain
Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;
When suddenly, out of the neighboring night,
A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,
And so startled his steed, that was winding at will
Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led
O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its head
Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand
Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,
Both rider and horse might have been in a trice
Hurl'd horribly over the grim precipice.

IX.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,
And the oath, with which nothing can find unprovided
A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,
Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did
Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not ruder
Than such inroad would warrant, survey'd the intruder,
Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory
My hero, and finish'd abruptly this story.

X.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,
Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,
Wore his beard and mustache in the fashion of France.
His face, which was pale, gather'd force from the glance
Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.
With a gest of apology, touch'd with surprise,
He lifted his hat, bow'd and courteously made
Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as betray'd,
At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XI.

I swear
I have wander'd about in the world everywhere;
From many strange mouths have heard many strange tongues;
Strain'd with many strange idioms my lips and my lungs;
Walk'd in many a far land, regretting my own;
In many a language groan'd many a groan;
And have often had reason to curse those wild fellows
Who built the high house at which Heaven turn'd jealous,
Making human audacity stumble and stammer
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of Grammar.
But the language of languages dearest to me
Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie,*
When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for hours,
You explain'd what was silently said by the flowers,
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmur'd *Je t'aime.*

XII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks; the Spanish
Smell, I fancy, of garlic; the Swedish and Danish
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod, in
Their accent for mouths not descended from Odin;

German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheezing
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneezing;
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly flutter'd,
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had been utter'd
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve,
I feel myself quietly falling in love

XIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark
Without fear.
And thus, not disagreeably impress'd,
As it seem'd, with each other, the two men abreast
Rode on slowly a moment.

XIV.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are
A smoker. Allow me!

ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here
Do you go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see
How narrow the path is. I 'm tempted to ask
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)
In your company.

ALFRED.

Charm'd, Sir, to find your road lies
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.
In the distant Savannahs a talisman grows
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who knows?
That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevart* outbroke,
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in smoke.
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)
Have done more in their way human kind to unite,
Perchance, than ten Prudhons.

STRANGER.

Yes. Ah, what a scene!

ALFRED.

Humph! Nature is here too pretentious. Her mien
Is too haughty. One likes to be coax'd, not compell'd,
To the notice such beauty resents if withheld.
She seems to be saying too plainly, "Admire me!"
And I answer, "Yes, madam, I do: but you tire me"

STRANGER.

That sunset, just now though . . .

ALFRED.

A very old trick!
One would think that the sun by this time must be sick
Of blushing at what, by this time, he must know
Too well to be shock'd by — this world.

STRANGER.

Ah, 't is so
With us all. 'T is the sinner that best knew the world
At Twenty, whose lip is, at sixty, most curl'd
With disdain of its follies. You stay at Serchon?

ALFRED.

A day or two only.

STRANGER.

The season is done.

ALFRED.

Already?

STRANGER.

'T was shorter this year than the last.
Folly soon wears her shoes out. She dances so fast,
We are all of us tired.

ALFRED.

You know the place well?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle
Of the Baths at this moment?

STRANGER.

The same who has been
The belle of all places in which she is seen;
The belle of all Paris last winter; last spring
The belle of all Baden.

ALFRED.

An uncommon thing!

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty! . . . I rather should say,
An uncommon character. Truly, each day
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers!

STRANGER.

Do you know her?

ALFRED.

I know,
Or, rather, I knew her — a long time ago.
I almost forget. . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace
In her language! her movements! what play in her face!
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal!

ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,
But not like a lover. What interests me so

In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,
A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this shade
Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make me afraid
Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have grown,
Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own
I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet
They have all lack'd the skill to console this regret
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems still
To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

XV.

The stranger replied, not without irritation:
"I have heard that an Englishman — one of your nation
I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,
To excuse the contempt which I . . ."

ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his crime?

STRANGER.

Oh, nothing! His folly was not so sublime
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

ALFRED.

How?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . I admit,
Although I myself have no passion for it,
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise
The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,
With a ruthless dissection; since he, I suppose,
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he does.
But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots
The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots,
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and haws,—
One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so nipp'd,
To catch the young rascal and have him well whipp'd!

ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English hand,
Has injured your Rosebud of France?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know
But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show
The last act of a tragedy in their regard:
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not hard
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have been,
And what sort of actors have pass'd o'er the scene.
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out, and burnt up
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze down the cup
Of extinguish'd volcanoes: you judge of the fire
Once there, by the ravage you see; — the desire,
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finish'd, at last, your cigar
Can I offer another?

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are
Not two miles from Serchon.

ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XVI.

Here a pause fell
On their converse. Still musingly on, side by side,
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each, for the rest
Of their journey, although they still rode on abreast,
Continued to follow in silence the train
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain;
And each, as though roused from a deep revery,
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,
With the lamps twinkling through them — the quaint wooden roofs —
The little white houses.
The clatter of hoofs,
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals
Reach'd them, cross'd by the sound of the clacking of whips
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips
Of verdant rose-gardens, deep-shelter'd with screens

Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,
They could mark the white dresses, and catch the light songs,
Of the lovely Parisians that wander'd in throngs,
Led by Laughter and Love through the cold eventide
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hillside.

XVII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'Herisson,
(Pray go there, if ever you go to Serchon!)
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reach'd it, alighted
And exchanged their last greetings.
The Frenchman invited
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined
In his own rooms that night.
With an unquiet eye
He watch'd his companion depart; nor knew why,
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.
"The fellow 's good-looking," he murmur'd at last,
"And yet not a coxcomb." Some ghost of the past
Vex'd him still.
"If he love her," he thought, "let him win her."
Then he turn'd to the future — and order'd his dinner.

XVIII.

O hour of all hours, the most bless'd upon earth,
Blesséd hour of our dinners!
The land of his birth;
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;
The twaddle of friends and the venom of foes;
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;
The money he borrow'd, the money he spent; —
All of these things a man, I believe, may forget,

And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet
Never, never, oh never! earth's luckiest sinner
Hath unpunish'd forgotten the hour of his dinner!
Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,
Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some ache
Or some pain; and trouble, remorseless, his best ease,
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XIX.

We may live without poetry, music, and art;
We may live without conscience, and live without heart:
We may live without friends; we may live without books;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
He may live without books, — what is knowledge but grieving?
He may live without hope, — what is hope but deceiving?
He may live without love, — what is passion but pining?
But where is the man that can live without dining?

XX.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note
From Lucile.
"Your last letter has reach'd me," she wrote.
"This evening, alas! I must go to the ball,
And shall not be at home till too late for your call;
But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*, at One
You will find me at home, and will find me alone.
Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,
For the honor with which you adhere to your word.
Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred! To-morrow then.
"L."

XXI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down

This note, as he pour'd out his wine. I must own
That I think he, himself, could have hardly explain'd
Those feelings exactly.
"Yes, yes," as he drain'd
The glass down, he mutter'd, "Jack 's right, after all
The coquette!"
"Does milord mean to go to the ball?"
Ask'd the waiter, who linger'd.
"Perhaps. I don't know.
You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go."

XXII.

Oh, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,
When season'd by love, which no rancor disturbs,
And sweeten'd by all that is sweetest in life,
Than turbot, bisque, ortolans, eaten in strife!
But if, out of humor, and hungry, alone,
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,
The chances are ten against one, I must own,
He gets up as ill-temper'd as when he sat down.
And if any reader this fact to dispute is
Disposed, I say . . . "*Allium edat cicutis*
Nocentius!"
Over the fruit and the wine
Undisturb'd the wasp settled. The evening was fine.
Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.
The window was open. The warm air without
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were about
In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXIII.

Gay sounds from below
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,

And night deepen'd apace; through the dark avenues
The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes, and by twos,
The idlers of Serchon were strolling at will,
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-sill,
Where his gaze, as he languidly turn'd it, fell o'er
His late travelling companion, now passing before
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,
In full toilet, — boots varnish'd, and snowy cravat,
Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,
As he turn'd down the avenue.
Watching above,
From his window, the stranger, who stopp'd as he walk'd
To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now talk'd,
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discern'd,
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were turn'd,
That this unknown acquaintance, now bound for the ball,
Was a person of rank or of fashion; for all
Whom he bow'd to in passing, or stopp'd with and chatter'd,
Walk'd on with a look which implied . . . . "I feel flatter'd!"

XXIV.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXV.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.
He had finish'd, one after the other, a dozen
Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin:
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile:
He had thought about many things: thought a great deal
Of himself: of his past life, his future, his present:
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor crescent:
Of the gay world, so sad! life, so sweet and so sour!
He had thought, too, of glory, and fortune, and power:
Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy, and

A poet's asylum in some distant land:
Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no doubt,
In particular; also he had thought much about
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner: and last,
He thought that the night would be stupidly pass'd
If he thought any more of such matters at all:
So he rose, and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXVI.

I believe, ere he finish'd his tardy toilet,
That Lord Alfred had spoil'd, and flung by in a pet,
Half a dozen white neckcloths, and look'd for the nonce
Twenty times in the glass, if he look'd in it once.
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,
When he reach'd the Casino, although he walk'd fast,
He heard, as he hurriedly enter'd the door,
The church clock strike Twelve.

XXVII.

The last waltz was just o'er
The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.
A crowd block'd the door: and a buzz and a mutter
Went about in the room as a young man, whose face
Lord Alfred had seen ere he enter'd that place,
But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and warm
Flowery porch, with a lady that lean'd on his arm
Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,
Left the ballroom.

XXVIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise
Reach'd Lord Alfred as just then he enter'd.

"THE LAST WALTZ WAS JUST O'ER."

"*Ma foi!*"
Said a Frenchman beside him, ... "That lucky Luvois
Has obtain'd all the gifts of the gods . . . rank and wealth,
And good looks, and then such inexhaustible health!
He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I surmise,
Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes
Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguish'd than all,
He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball."
"Is it true," ask'd a lady aggressively fat,
Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat
By another that look'd like a needle, all steel
And tenuity — "Luvois will marry Lucile?"
The needle seem'd jerk'd by a virulent twitch,
As though it were bent upon driving a stitch
Through somebody's character.
"Madam," replied,
Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,
And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,
"I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,
If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused."
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.
"Refused! . . . what! a young Duke, not thirty, my dear,
With at least half a million (what is it?) a year!"
"That may be," said the third; "yet I know some time since
Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a Prince.
But Luvois, who was never before in his life
In love with a woman who was not a wife,
Is now certainly serious."

XXIX.

The music once more
Recommenced.

XXX.

Said Lord Alfred, "This ball is a bore!
And return'd to the inn, somewhat worse than before.

XXXI.

There, whilst musing he lean'd the dark valley above,
Through the warm land were wand'ring the spirits of love.
A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirr'd;
In the blossom'd acacia the lone cricket chirr'd;
The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in light.
Repose, and yet rapture! that pensive wild nature
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature!
A stone's throw from thence, through the large lime-trees peep'd
In a garden of roses, a white châlet, steep'd
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to the lawn;
The casements were open; the curtains were drawn;
Lights stream'd from the inside; and with them the sound
Of music and song. In the garden, around
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,
Half a dozen young men and young women were met.
Light, laughter, and voices, and music, all stream'd
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window there seem'd
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,
Of a white dress, a white neck, and soft dusky hair,
Which Lord Alfred remember'd . . . a moment or so
It hover'd, then pass'd into shadow; and slow
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,
Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung: —

"Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth!
The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,
And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth
'Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the sea.

"And this ship is a world. She is freighted with souls,
She is freighted with merchandise: proudly she sails
With the Labor that stores, and the Will that controls
The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the rose,
And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,

Past the harbors of Traffic, sublimely she goes,
Man's hopes o'er the world of the waters to bear!

"Where the cheer from the harbors of Traffic is heard,
Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the sight,
O'er the rose, o'er the cedar, there passes a bird;
'T is the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

"And that bird, bright and bold as a Poet's desire,
Roams her own native heavens, the realms of her birth.
There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a fire,
And her plumage hath never been sullied by earth.

"And the mariners greet her; there 's song on each lip,
For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.
And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the ship,
Together go forth over ocean and sky.

"Fast, fast fades the land! far the rose-gardens flee,
And far fleet the harbors. In regions unknown
The ship is alone on a desert of sea,
And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

"In those regions unknown, o'er that desert of air,
Down that desert of waters — tremendous in wrath —
The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,
And cleaves, through the waves of the ocean, his path.

"And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the wave,
Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales;
And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,
Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been heard,
For it never before hath been given to sight;
On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,
The Paradise Bird, never known to alight!

" The bird which the mariners bless'd, when each lip
Had a song for the omen that gladden'd each eye;
The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship
From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in the sky.

" But the mariners heed not the bird any more.
They are felling the masts — they are cutting the sails;
Some are working, some weeping, and some wrangling o'er
Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.

" Souls of men are on board; wealth of man in the hold;
And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his prey;
And who heeds the bird? 'Save the silk and the gold!'
And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps away!

" Poor Paradise Bird! on her lone flight once more
Back again in the wake of the wind she is driven —
To be 'whelm'd in the storm, or above it to soar,
And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in heaven!

" And the ship rides the waters, and weathers the gales:
From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.
All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,
Save a child, sitting lonely, who misses — the Bird!"

CANTO III.

I.

With stout iron shoes be my Pegasus shod!
For my road is a rough one: flint, stubble, and clod,
Blue clay, and black quagmire, brambles no few,
And I gallop up-hill, now.
There 's terror that 's true
In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,

Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some devil,
Follow'd ever one mask through the mad masquerade,
Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('t is said),
He unmask'd, with a kiss, the strange lady, and stood
Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.
In this Masque of the Passions, call'd Life, there's no human
Emotion, though mask'd, or in man or in woman,
But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at last
Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
For truth is appalling and eltrich, as seen
By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life.
Alas! why is Genius forever at strife
With the world, which, despite the world's self, it ennobles?
Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles
And offends the effete life it comes to renew?
'T is the terror of truth! 't is that Genius is true!

II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)
Was a woman of genius: whose genius, indeed,
With her life was at war. Once, but once, in that life
The chance had been hers to escape from this strife
In herself; finding peace in the life of another
From the passionate wants she, in hers, failed to smother.
But the chance fell too soon, when the crude restless power
Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,
Only wearied the man it yet haunted and thrall'd;
And that moment, once lost, had been never recall'd.
Yet it left her heart sore: and, to shelter her heart
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art
Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies
Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,
A weapon, at once, and a shield, to conceal
And defend all that women can earnestly feel.
Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,
She felt frighten'd at times by her very success:

She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars:
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars
If they keep us behind prison-windows: impassion'd
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashion'd
Out of glittering trifles around it.
Unknown
To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.
The strong spirit in her, had her life but been blended
With some man's whose heart had her own comprehended,
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.
For him she had struggled and striven alone;
For him had aspired; in him had transfused
All the gladness and grace of her nature; and used
For him only the spells of its delicate power:
Like the ministering fairy that brings from her bower
To some maze all the treasures, whose use the fond elf,
More enrich'd by her love, disregards for herself.
But standing apart, as she ever had done,
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding none
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's power,
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she hurl'd
Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the world.

And the permanent cause why she now miss'd and fail'd
That firm hold upon life she so keenly assail'd,
Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place
Say — the world and the woman opposed face to face,
Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to stir,
Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

As before, in the old-fashion'd manner, I fit
To this character, also, its moral: to wit,
Say — the world is a nettle; disturb it, it stings:
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things,
If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle:
Avoid it, or crush it. She crush'd not the nettle;

For she could not; nor would she avoid it: she tried
With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,
And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing
To trample the world without feeling its sting.

III.

One lodges but simply at Serchon; yet, thanks
To the season that changes forever the banks
Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light cloud
O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud
Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring down
The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,
And the blue-bells that purple the dapple-gray scaur,
One sees with each month of the many-faced year
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.
The châlet where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,
In a garden of roses, reveal'd to the road,
Yet withdrawn from its noise: 't was a peaceful abode.
And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like hoods
Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resinous woods.
The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended
The steep garden paths, every odor had blended
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded slopes:
A light breeze at the windows was playing about,
And the white curtains floated, now in, and now out.
The house was all hush'd when he rang at the door,
Which was open'd to him in a moment, or more,
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head shined
In the sun like a cocoa-nut polish'd in Ind,
'Neath the snowy *foulard* which about it was wound.

IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.
He remember'd the nurse of Lucile. The old dame,

Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when he came,
With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.
The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee
When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,
In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,
To pine, a pale flow'ret, in great Paris town.
She had sooth'd the child's sobs on her breast, when she read
The letter that told her, her father was dead.
An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,
Had studied men, cities, laws, wars, the abysses
Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.
He had wander'd the world through, by land and by sea,
And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,
Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill
To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave
Her displeasure. Thrice shipwreck'd, and cast by the wave
On his own quick resources, they rarely had fail'd
His command: often baffled, he ever prevail'd,
In his combat with fate: to-day flatter'd and fed
By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread.
The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came
Of a family ruin'd, yet noble in name.
He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France;
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Free-lance,
Had wander'd in search of it, over the world,
Into India.

But scarce had the nomad unfurl'd
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile
Of a Rajah (whose court he controll'd for a while,
And whose council he prompted and govern'd by stealth);
Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,
Who died giving birth to this daughter, before
He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.
His fortune, which fell to his orphan, perchance
Had secured her a home with his sister in France,
A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile
Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal

The half-Eastern blood, which appear'd to bequeath
(Reveal'd now and then, though but rarely, beneath
That outward repose that conceal'd it in her)
A something half wild to her strange character.
The nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-hearted,
At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.
But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,
When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been married
To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,
With no claim on her tears — she had wept as a bride.
Said Lord Alfred, "Your mistress expects me."
The crone
Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him alone.

V.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace
Rested silence and perfume. No sound reach'd the place.
In the white curtains waver'd the delicate shade
Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze play'd.
O'er the smooth wooden floor, polish'd dark as a glass,
Fragrant white Indian matting allow'd you to pass.
In light olive baskets, by window and door,
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the floor,
Rich wild flowers pluck'd by Lucile from the hill,
Seem'd the room with their passionate presence to fill:
Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed;
The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed;
And the frail saponaire, and the tender blue-bell,
And the purple valerian, — each child of the fell
And the solitude flourish'd, fed fair from the source
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course,
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

VI.

Here you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,
That you stood in a shrine of sweet thoughts. Half unclosed

In the light slept the flowers: all was pure and at rest;
All peaceful; all modest; all seem'd self-possess'd,
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place.
He stood by the window. A cloud pass'd the sun.
A light breeze uplifted the leaves, one by one.
Just then Lucile entered the room, undiscern'd
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was turn'd,
In a strange revery.
The time was, when Lucile,
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal
The rapture, the fear, which wrench'd out every nerve
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.
And now — she gazed at him, calm, smiling, — perchance
Indifferent.

VII.

Indifferently turning his glance,
Alfred Vargrave encounter'd that gaze unaware.
O'er a bodice snow-white stream'd her soft dusky hair;
A rose-bud half blown in her hand; in her eyes
A half-pensive smile.
A sharp cry of surprise
Escaped from his lips: some unknown agitation,
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,
Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit;
Overtook, and entangled, and paralyzed it.
That wit so complacent and docile, that ever
Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavor,
Ready coin'd, and availably current as gold,
Which, secure of its value, so fluently roll'd
In free circulation from hand on to hand
For the usage of all, at a moment's command;
For once it rebell'd, it was mute and unstirr'd,
And he look'd at Lucile without speaking a word.

JUST THEN LUCILE ENTERED THE ROOM.

VIII.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face
On whose features he gazed had no more than a trace
Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.
Yes! the face he remember'd was faded with tears:
Grief had famish'd the figure, and dimm'd the dark eyes,
And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with sighs.
And that tender, and gracious, and fond *coquetterie*
Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be
Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress
Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,
In the careless toilet of Lucile, — then too sad
To care aught to her changeable beauty to add —
Lord Alfred had never admired before!
Alas! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,
Had neglected herself, never heeding, nor thinking
(While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were shrinking)
That sorrow can beautify only the heart —
Not the face — of a woman; and can but impart
Its endearment to one that has suffer'd. In truth
Grief hath beauty for grief; but gay youth loves gay youth.

IX.

The woman that now met, unshrinking, his gaze,
Seem'd to bask in the silent but sumptuous haze
Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the first,
Which returns when the bud to the blossom hath burst
In despite of the stormiest April. Lucile
Had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal
To the homage which none but a churl would withhold —
That caressing and exquisite grace — never bold,
Ever present — which just a few women possess.
From a healthful repose, undisturb'd by the stress
Of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn
A freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.

Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere
The luxurious proportions of youth ; and her hair —
Once shorn as an offering to passionate love —
Now floated or rested redundant above
Her airy pure forehead and throat ; gather'd loose
Under which, by one violet knot, the profuse
Milk-white folds of a cool modest garment reposed,
Rippled faint by the breast they half hid, half disclosed,
And her simple attire thus in all things reveal'd
The fine art which so artfully all things conceal'd.

X.

Lord Alfred, who never conceived that Lucile
Could have look'd so enchanting, felt tempted to kneel
At her feet, and her pardon with passion implore ;
But the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore
The pride and the bitterness needed to meet
The occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XI.

" Madam," — thus he began with a voice reassured, —
" You see that your latest command has secured
My immediate obedience — presuming I may
Consider my freedom restored from this day."—
" I had thought," said Lucile, with a smile gay yet sad,
" That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.
Indeed ! . . . in my chains have you rested till now ?
I had not so flattered myself, I avow ! "
" For Heaven's sake, Madam," Lord Alfred replied,
" Do not jest ! has the moment no sadness ?" he sigh'd.
" 'T is an ancient tradition," she answer'd, " a tale
Often told — a position too sure to prevail
In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,
When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet remote,

Wherein of necessity each would recall
From the other the poor foolish records of all
Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded, seem'd bliss,
Should we write as we wrote? But one thinks not of this!
At Twenty (who does not at Twenty?) we write
Believing eternal the frail vows we plight;
And we smile with a confident pity, above
The vulgar results of all poor human love:
For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,
Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,
Is novel to us — that 't is novel to earth,
And will prove the exception, in durance and worth,
To the great law to which all on earth must incline.
The error was noble, the vanity fine!
Shall we blame it because we survive it? ah, no;
'T was the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not so?"

XII.

Lord Alfred was mute. He remember'd her yet
A child — the weak sport of each moment's regret,
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,
The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the strife
And the tumult of passion; the tremulous toy
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of all
The illusions of life — lift, unflinching, the pall
From the bier of the dead Past — that woman so fair,
And so young, yet her own self-survivor; who there
Traced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold!
'T was a picture that pain'd his self-love to behold.
He himself knew — none better — the things to be said
Upon subjects like this. Yet he bow'd down his head
And as thus, with a trouble he could not command,
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his hand,
"You know me enough," she continued, "or what
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,

Lord Alfred?) enough of my nature, to know
That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago
A foolish affection, I do not recall
From those motives of prudence which actuate all
Or most women when their love ceases. Indeed,
If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need
But remind you that ten years these letters have rested
Unreclaim'd in your hands." A reproach seem'd suggested
By these words. To meet it, Lord Alfred look'd up.
(His gaze had been fix'd on a blue Sèvres cup
With a look of profound connoisseurship — a smile
Of singular interest and care, all this while.)
He look'd up, and look'd long in the face of Lucile,
To mark if that face by a sign would reveal
At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous pain.
He look'd keenly and long, yet he look'd there in vain.
"You are generous, Madam," he murmur'd at last,
And into his voice a light irony pass'd.
He had look'd for reproaches, and fully arranged
His forces. But straightway the enemy changed
The position.

XIII.

"Come!" gayly Lucile interposed,
With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed
Some depth in her nature he never had known,
While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,
"Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain
Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in vain.
From me not a single reproach can you hear.
I have sinn'd to myself — to the world — nay, I fear
To you chiefly. The woman who loves should, indeed,
Be the friend of the man that she loves. She should heed
Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,
But his interest whose fate her own interest inspires;
And, rather than seek to allure, for her sake,
His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake

Of impossible destinies, use all her art
That his place in the world find its place in her heart.
I, alas! — I perceived not this truth till too late;
I tormented your youth, I have darken'd your fate.
Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake
Of its long expiation!"

XIV.

Lord Alfred, awake,
Seem'd to wander from dream on to dream. In that seat
Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet
His accuser, he found himself turn'd by some change,
As surprising and all unexpected as strange,
To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was sought.
All the world's foolish pride in that moment was naught;
He felt all his plausible theories posed;
And, thrill'd by the beauty of nature disclosed
In the pathos of all he had witness'd, his head
He bow'd, and faint words self-reproachfully said,
As he lifted her hand to his lips. 'T was a hand
White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.
The hand of a woman is often, in youth,
Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat graceless, in truth;
Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,
Or as Sorrow has cross'd the life-line in the palm?

XV.

The more that he look'd, that he listen'd, the more
He discover'd perfections unnoticed before.
Less salient than once, less poetic, perchance,
This woman who thus had survived the romance
That had made him its hero, and breathed him its sighs,
Seem'd more charming a thousand times o'er to his eyes
Together they talk'd of the years since when last
They parted, contrasting the present, the past.
Yet no memory marr'd their light converse. Lucile

Question'd much, with the interest a sister might feel,
Of Lord Alfred's new life, — of Miss Darcy — her face,
Her temper, accomplishments — pausing to trace
The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.
Of herself, she recounted with humor and wit
Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands
She had seen, and the books she had read, and the hands
She had shaken.
In all that she said there appear'd
An amiable irony. Laughing, she rear'd
The temple of reason, with ever a touch
Of light scorn at her work, reveal'd only so much
As there gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals bear,
Through the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.
But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,
To that soul, whose experience had paralyzed bliss,
A benignant indulgence, to all things resign'd,
A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,
Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint
And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

XVI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fleeted by.
To each novel sensation spontaneously
He abandon'd himself with that ardor so strange
Which belongs to a mind grown accustom'd to change.
He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,
To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart;
But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,
More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavor.
When he deem'd he had touch'd on some chord in her being,
At the touch it dissolved, and was gone. Ever fleeing
As ever he near it advanced, when he thought
To have seized, and proceeded to analyze aught
Of the moral existence, the absolute soul,
Light as vapor the phantom escaped his control.

XVII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.
In the passage without a quick footstep there stirr'd.
At the door knock'd the negress, and thrust in her head,
"The Duke de Luvois had just enter'd," she said,
"And insisted"—
"The Duke!" cried Lucile (as she spoke
The Duke's step, approaching, a light echo woke).
"Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,"
As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,
"I have business of private importance."
There came
O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that name,
An invincible sense of vexation. He turn'd
To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discern'd
On her face an indefinite look of confusion.
On his mind instantaneously flash'd the conclusion
That his presence had caused it.
He said, with a sneer
Which he could not repress, "Let not *me* interfere
With the claims on your time, lady! when you are free
From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see
And to wait on you later."
The words were not said
Ere he wish'd to recall them. He bitterly read
The mistake he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.
Inclining her head, as in haughty reply,
More reproachful perchance than all utter'd rebuke,
She said merely, resuming her seat, "Tell the Duke
He may enter."
And vex'd with his own words and hers,
Alfred Vargrave bow'd low to Lucile de Nevers,
Pass'd the casement and enter'd the garden. Before
His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

XVIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,
Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With dull tone
Of importance, through cities of rose and carnation,
Went the bee on his business from station to station.
The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around;
Its incessant small voices like stings seem'd to sound
On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the hot
Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirr'd from the spot.
The last look of Lucile still bewilder'd, perplex'd,
And reproach'd him. The Duke's visit goaded and vex'd.
He had not yet given the letters. Again
He must visit Lucile. He resolved to remain
Where he was till the Duke went. In short, he would stay,
Were it only to know when the Duke went away.
But just as he form'd this resolve, he perceived
Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved
And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.
Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for some nook
Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden retreat.
They had not yet seen him. The sound of their feet
And their voices had warn'd him in time. They were walking
Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was talking
With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance
That they barr'd the sole path to the gateway. No chance
Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-dipp'd
In thick foliage, an arbor stood near. In he slipp'd,
Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they pass'd,
Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last
They paused, and sat down on a bench in the shade,
So close that he could not but hear what they said.

XIX

LUCILE.

Duke, I scarcely conceive . . .

LUVOIS.

Ah, forgive! . . . I desired
So deeply to see you to-day. You retired
So early last night from the ball . . . this whole week
I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . . speak,
Speak, Lucile, and forgive me! . . . I know that I am
A rash fool — but I love you! I love you, Madame,
More than language can say! Do not deem, O Lucile,
That the love I no longer have strength to conceal
Is a passing caprice! It is strange to my nature,
It has made me, unknown to myself, a new creature.
I implore you to sanction and save the new life
Which I lay at your feet with this prayer — Be my wife;
Stoop, and raise me!

Lord Alfred could scarcely restrain
The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain
With which he had heard this. As though to some wind
The leaves of the hush'd, windless laurels behind
The two thus in converse were suddenly stirr'd.
The sound half betrayed him. They started. He heard
The low voice of Lucile; but so faint was its tone
That her answer escaped him.

Luvois hurried on,
As though in remonstrance with what had been spoken.
"Nay, I know it, Lucile! but your heart was not broken
By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.
Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be loved.
You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mistake
What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make
Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever your heart
May have suffer'd of yore, this can only impart
A pity profound to the love which I feel.
Hush! hush! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lucile."

"You know all, Duke?" she said; "well then, know that, in truth,

I have learn'd from the rude lesson taught to my youth
From my own heart to shelter my life; to mistrust
The heart of another. We are what we must,
And not what we would be. I know that one hour
Assures not another. The will and the power
Are diverse."

"O madam!" he answer'd, "you fence
With a feeling you know to be true and intense.
'T is not *my* life, Lucile, that I plead for alone:
If your nature I know, 't is no less for your own.
That nature will prey on itself; it was made
To influence others. Consider," he said,
"That genius craves power — what scope for it here?
Gifts less noble to *me* give command of that sphere
In which genius *is* power. Such gifts you despise?
But you do not disdain what such gifts realize!
I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown —
A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown —
All my life at your feet I lay down — at your feet
A heart which for you, and you only, can beat."

LUCILE.

That heart, Duke, that life — I respect both. The name
And position you offer, and all that you claim
In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel
To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you —

LUVOIS.

Lucile!

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me —

LUVOIS.

You do not reject?

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

You ask me? —

LUCILE.

— The time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

Say — One word!

May I hope?

The reply of Lucile was not heard
By Lord Alfred; for just then she rose, and moved on.
The Duke bow'd his lips o'er her hand, and was gone.

XX.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And when
Alfred Vargrave reel'd forth to the sunlight again,
He just saw the white robe of the woman recede
As she enter'd the house.

Scarcely conscious indeed
Of his steps, he too follow'd, and enter'd.

XXI.

He enter'd
Unnoticed; Lucile never stirr'd: so concentred
And wholly absorb'd in her thoughts she appear'd.
Her back to the window was turn'd. As he near'd
The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.
Her dark eyes were fix'd on the ground. Pale, dejected,
And lost in profound meditation she seem'd.
Softly, silently, over her droop'd shoulders stream'd
The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm
And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm
Alfred Vargrave let fall a hand icily cold
And clammy as death, all too cruelly told
How far he had been from her thoughts.

XXII.

All his cheek
Was disturb'd with the effort it cost him to speak.
"It was not my fault. I have heard all," he said.
"Now the letters — and farewell, Lucile! When you wed
May —"
The sentence broke short, like a weapon that snap
When the weight of a man is upon it.
"Perhaps,"
Said Lucile (her sole answer reveal'd in the flush
Of quick color which up to her brows seem'd to rush
In reply to those few broken words), "this farewell
Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can tell?
Let us part without bitterness. Here are your letters.
Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!" —
She laughed, as she said this, a little sad laugh,
And stretched out her hand with the letters. And half
Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust
His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he thrust
The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,
Bow'd his head, and departed without a reply.

XXIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world
Were gone back to the world. And the world's self was furl'd
Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand
Droop'd, and from it, unloosed from their frail silken band,
Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scatter'd, and shed
At her feet — life's lost blossoms! Dejected, her head
On her bosom was bow'd. Her gaze vaguely stray'd o'er
Those strewn records of passionate moments no more.
From each page to her sight leapt some word that belied
The composure with which she that day had denied
Every claim on her heart to those poor perish'd years.
They avenged themselves now, and she burst into tears.

CANTO IV.

I.

LETTER FROM COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

"BIGORRE, Thursday.

"TIME up, you rascal! Come back, or be hang'd.
Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued
For a whole hour this morning about you. The deuce!
What on earth can I say to you? — nothing 's of use.
And the blame of the whole of your shocking behavior
Falls on *me*, sir! Come back, — do you hear? — or I leave your
Affairs, and abjure you for ever. Come back
To your anxious betroth'd; and perplex'd

"COUSIN JACK."

II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John
To increase his impatience to fly from Serchon.
All the place was now fraught with sensations of pain
Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in vain.
A wild instinct warn'd him to fly from a place
Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,
Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavor
To think of Matilda, her image forever
Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.
From the ground which he stood on he felt himself reel.
Scared, alarm'd by those feelings to which, on the day
Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,
When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for assistance
At what was, till then, the great fact in existence,
'T was a phantom he grasp'd.

III.

Having sent for his guide,
He order'd his horse, and determin'd to ride
Back forthwith to Bigorre.

Then, the guide, who well knew
Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo
Lay a league from Serchon; and suggested a track
By the lake to Bigorre, which, transversing the back
Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between
Two long valleys; and thinking, "Perchance change of scene
May create change of thought," Alfred Vargrave agreed,
Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full speed.

IV.

His guide rode beside him.
The king of the guides!
The gallant Bernard! ever boldly he rides,
Ever gayly he sings! For to him, from of old,
The hills have confided their secrets, and told
Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o' the woods;
Where the izard flits fine through the cold solitudes;
Where the bear lurks perdu; and the lynx on his prey
At nightfall descends, when the mountains are gray;
Where the sassafras blooms, and the blue-bell is born,
And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn;
Where the source of the waters is fine as a thread;
How the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread;
Where the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie asleep,
Whence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts leap;
And, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales
Have whisper'd to him all their thousand love-tales;
He has laugh'd with the girls, he has leap'd with the boys;
Ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys
An existence untroubled by envy or strife,
While he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.
And so lightly he sings, and so gayly he rides,
For Bernard le Sauteur is the king of all guides!

V.

But Bernard found, that day, neither song nor love-tale,
Nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail

To arouse from his deep and profound revery
Him that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slacken'd their pace,
And the marvellous prospect each moment changed face.
The breezy and pure inspirations of morn
Breathed about them. The scarp'd ravaged mountains, all worn
By the torrents, whose course they watch'd faintly meander,
Were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.
They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,
And wound through a region of green wildernesses;
The waters went wirbling above and around,
The forests hung heap'd in their shadows profound.
Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,
Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux
They mark'd; and far down in the sunshine below,
Half dipp'd in a valley of airiest blue,
The white happy homes of the village of Oo,
Where the age is yet golden.
And high overhead
The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.
Red granite and quartz, in the alchemic sun,
Fused their splendors of crimson and crystal in one;
And deep in the moss gleam'd the delicate shells,
And the dew linger'd fresh in the heavy harebells;
The large violet burn'd; the campanula blue;
And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peer'd through
The red-berried brambles and thick sassafras;
And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass,
And high up, and higher, and highest of all,
The secular phantom of snow!
O'er the wall
Of a gray sunless glen gaping drowsy below,
That aërial spectre, reveal'd in the glow

Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye,
And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky,
And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.
Only reach'd by the vast rosy ripple of light,
And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,
Half unreal, like some mythological king
That dominates all in a fable of old,
Takes command of a valley as fair to behold
As aught in old fables; and, seen or unseen,
Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene
Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furl'd
'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite world
Of man's last aspirations, unfathom'd, untrod,
Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.

VII.

Meanwhile, as they journey'd, that serpentine road,
Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly show'd
A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.
Alfred Vargrave's heart beat; for he saw at a glance
The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next look
Show'd him, joyously ambling beside her, the Duke.
The rest of the troop which had thus caught his ken
He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).
They were laughing and talking together. Soon after
His sudden appearance suspended their laughter.

VIII.

"You here! . . . I imagined you far on your way
To Bigorre!" . . . said Lucile. "What has caused you to stay?"
"I *am* on my way to Bigorre," he replied,
"But, since *my* way would seem to be *yours*, let me ride
For one moment beside you." And then, with a stoop,
At her ear, . . . "and forgive me!"

IX.

By this time the troop
Had regather'd its numbers.
Lucile was as pale
As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the vale.
The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,
For even one moment, the whole of the ride.
Alfred smiled, as he thought, "he is jealous of her!"
And the thought of this jealousy added a spur
To his firm resolution and effort to please.
He talk'd much; was witty, and quite at his ease.

X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed the east
Half the day, gather'd closer, and rose and increased.
The air changed and chill'd. As though out of the ground,
There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,
And the wind rose. The guides sniff'd, like chamois the air,
And look'd at each other, and halted, and there
Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The white
Aspens rustled, and turn'd up their frail leaves in fright.
All announced the approach of the tempest.
Erelong,
Thick darkness descended the mountains among;
And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash
Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a gash.
The rain fell in large heavy drops. And anon
Broke the thunder.
The horses took fright, every one.
The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.
The guides whoop'd. The band was obliged to alight;
And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walk'd blind
To the darkness before from the darkness behind.

XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains!
He fills

The crouch'd hollows and all the oracular hills
With dread voices of power. A roused million or more
Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves vivid the lake.
And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder descends
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain ends;
He howls as he hounds down his prey; and his lash
Tears the hair of the timorous wan mountain-ash,
That clings to the rocks, with her garments all torn,
Like a woman in fear; then he blows his hoarse horn,
And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and terror,
Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error
Of mountain and mist.

XII.

There is war in the skies!
Lo! the black-wingéd legions of tempest arise
O'er those sharp splinter'd rocks that are gleaming below
In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though
Some seraph burn'd through them, the thunderbolt searching
Which the black cloud unbosom'd just now. Lo! the lurching
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem
To waver above, in the dark; and yon stream,
How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white
And paralyzed lake there, appall'd at the sight
Of the things seen in heaven!

XIII.

Through the darkness and awe
That had gather'd around him, Lord Alfred now saw,
Reveal'd in the fierce and evanishing glare
Of the lightning that momently pulsed through the air,
A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,
With her cheek coldly propp'd on her hand, — and as still
As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above
The black lake beneath her.

All terror, all love
Added speed to the instinct with which he rush'd on.
For one moment the blue lightning swathed the whole stone
In its lurid embrace: like the sleek dazzling snake
That encircles a sorceress, charm'd for her sake
And lull'd by her loveliness; fawning, it play'd
And caressingly twined round the feet and the head
Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm
As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm
Of the plangent and laboring tempest roll slow
From the caldron of midnight and vapor below.
Next moment from bastion to bastion, all round,
Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the sound
Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,
And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile.

XIV.

She started. Once more, with its flickering wand,
The lightning approach'd her. In terror, her hand
Alfred Vargrave had seized within his; and he felt
The light fingers that coldly and lingeringly dwelt
In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.
"See! see!
Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled yon tree!"
She exclaim'd, . . . "like the passion that brings on its breath,
To the being it embraces, destruction and death!
Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you!"
"Lucile!
I hear — I see — naught but yourself. I can feel
Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights in vain
With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet again
'Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above
To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love, —
And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,
I humble my head and my heart. I entreat
Your pardon, Lucile, for the past — I implore
For the future your mercy — implore it with more

Of passion than prayer ever breathed. By the power
Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,
By the rights I have o'er you, Lucile, I demand"—

"The rights!" . . . said Lucile, and drew from him her hand.

"Yes, the rights! for what greater to man may belong
Than the right to repair in the future the wrong
To the past? and the wrong I have done you, of yore,
Hath bequeath'd to me all the sad right to restore,
To retrieve, to amend! I, who injured your life,
Urge the right to repair it, Lucile! Be my wife,
My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,
And accept, for the sake of what yet may give worth
To my life, its contrition!"

XV.

He paused, for there came
O'er the cheek of Lucile a swift flush like the flame
That illumined at moments the darkness o'erhead.
With a voice faint and marr'd by emotion, she said,
"And your pledge to another?"

XVI.

"Hush, hush!" he exclaim'd,
"My honor will live where my love lives, unshamed.
'T were poor honor indeed, to another to give
That life of which *you* keep the heart. Could I live
In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a lie?
Alas, no! *your* hand holds my whole destiny.
I can never recall what my lips have avow'd;
In your love lies whatever can render me proud.
For the great crime of all my existence hath been
To have known you in vain. And the duty best seen,
And most hallow'd — the duty most sacred and sweet
Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.

O speak! and restore me the blessing I lost
When I lost you — my pearl of all pearls beyond cost!
And restore to your own life its youth, and restore
The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore!
Ere our brows had been dimm'd in the dust of the world,
When our souls their white wings yet exulting unfurl'd!
For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,
The wild star of whose course its pale orbit outran,
Whom the formless indefinite future of youth,
With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth
I have wearily wander'd the world, and I feel
That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,
Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream
Which, though follow'd forever, forever doth seem
As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore
When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore
Of life's untraversed ocean! I know the sole path
To repose, which my desolate destiny hath,
Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.
And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,
And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,
The sublimity in you, as he whom at length
These have saved from himself, for the truth they reveal
To his worship?"

XVII.

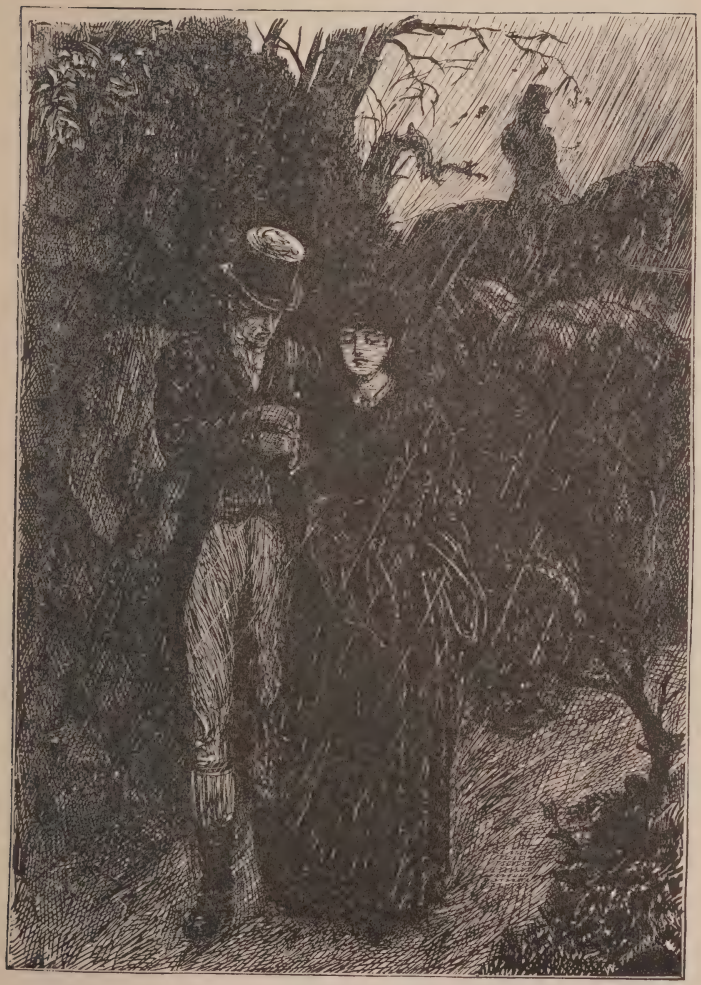
She spoke not; but Alfred could feel
The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,
Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were half closed;
But, under their languid mysterious fringe,
A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge
Of faint inward fire flush'd transparently through
The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue
Of the cheek, half averted and droop'd. The rich bosom
Heaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose-blossom
A bee is imprison'd and struggles.

XVIII.

Meanwhile
The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile
Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold!
O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,
Rose and rested: while far up the dim airy crags,
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet
The powers of the night, which, now gathering afar,
Had already sent forward one bright, signal star.
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to wear,
Had escaped; and Lord Alfred now cover'd with kisses
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not yet
Had ceased falling around them; when, splash'd, drench'd, and wet,
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain course
Approached them as fast as the road, and his horse,
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had just now
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had thrown;
But the Duke, who was agile, had leap'd to a stone,
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which fills
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,
Had scrambled again to his feet; and now master
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,
The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his wrist,
Bruised and bleeding.

XIX.

If ever your feet, like my own,
O reader, have traversed these mountains alone,
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract
At the sound of the distant and dim cataract,



NEITHER HE NOR LUCILE FELT THE RAIN

In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedew'd with its spray,
And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and roll'd,
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heap'd over fold,
Track'd the summits, from which every step that you tread
Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the bed
Of invisible waters, whose mystical sound
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?
And, laboring onwards, at last through a break
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?

If you have, this description I might have withheld.
You remember how strangely your bosom has swell'd
At the vision reveal'd. On the overwork'd soil
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpen'd by toil;
And one seems, by the pain of ascending the height,
To have conquer'd a claim to that wonderful sight.

XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud and the snow;
For o'er thee the angels have whiten'd their wings,
And the thirst of the seraphs is quench'd at thy springs.
What hand hath, in heaven, upheld thine expanse?
When the breath of creation first fashion'd fair France,
Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow appalling,
Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy basin while falling?
Ere the mammoth was born hath some monster unnamed
The base of thy mountainous pedestal framed?
And later, when Power to Beauty was wed,
Did some delicate fairy embroider thy bed
With the fragile valerian and wild columbine?

XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will keep mine;
For once gazing on thee, it flash'd on my soul,

All that secret! I saw in a vision the whole
Vast design of the ages; what was and shall be!
Hands unseen raised the veil of a great mystery
For one moment. I saw, and I heard; and my heart
Bore witness within me to infinite art,
In infinite power proving infinite love;
Caught the great choral chant, mark'd the dread pageant move —
The divine Whence and Whither of life! But, O daughter
Of Oo, not more safe in the deep silent water
Is thy secret, than mine in my heart. Even so.
What I then saw and heard, the world never shall know.

XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the valleys had closed,
The rain had ceased falling, the mountains reposed.
The stars had enkindled in luminous courses
Their slow-sliding lamps, when, remounting their horses,
The riders retraversed that mighty serration
Of rock-work. Thus left to its own desolation,
The lake, from whose glimmering limits the last
Transient pomp of the pageants of sunset had pass'd,
Drew into its bosom the darkness, and only
Admitted within it one image — a lonely
And tremulous phantom of flickering light
That follow'd the mystical moon through the night.

XXIII.

It was late when o'er Serchon at last they descended.
To her châlet, in silence, Lord Alfred attended
Lucile. As they parted she whisper'd him low,
"You have made to me, Alfred, an offer I know
All the worth of, believe me. I cannot reply
Without time for reflection. Good night! — not good by."

"Alas! 't is the very same answer you made
To the Duc de Luvois but a day since," he said.

"No, Alfred! the very same, no," she replied.
Her voice shook. "If you love me, obey me. Abide
My answer, to-morrow."

XXIV.

Alas, Cousin Jack!
You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your back
To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory
Amongst thine own people.
I follow my story.

CANTO V.

I.

Up! — forth again, Pegasus! — "Many 's the slip,"
Hath the proverb well said, "'twixt the cup and the lip!"
How blest should we be, have I often conceived,
Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!
We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would be,
And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.
So it will be, so has been, since this world began!
And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man
Is the part which he never hath fully play'd out:
For the first and last word in life's volume is — Doubt.
The face the most fair to our vision allow'd
Is the face we encounter and lose in the crowd.
The thought that most thrills our existence is one
Which, before we can frame it in language, is gone.
O Horace! the rustic still rests by the river,
But the river flows on, and flows past him forever!

Who can sit down, and say . . . "What I will be, I will"?
Who stand up, and affirm . . . "What I was, I am still"?
Who is it that must not, if question'd, say . . . "What
I would have remain'd, or become, I am not"?
We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside
Our intrinsic existence. Forever at hide
And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone
Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,
Do the Danaïds ply, ever vainly, the sieve.
Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.
Yet there 's none so unhappy, but what he hath been
Just about to be happy, at some time, I ween;
And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,
But what once, in his life, some minute circumstance
Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss
Which, missing it then, he forever must miss.
And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would have;
But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too late.
The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.
Yet! there 's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;
But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
Though the cup may next moment be shatter'd, the wine
Spilt, one deep health I 'll pledge, and that health shall be thine,
O being of beauty and bliss! seen and known
In the deeps of my soul, and possess'd there alone!
My days know thee not; and my lips name thee never.
Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever.
We have met: we have parted. No more is recorded
In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded
To the man whom men know me, or deem me, to be.
But, far down, in the depth of my life's mystery,
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it swells,
Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,
'Mid the world's adamantine and dim pedestals;

At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for whom
The almondine glimmers, the soft samphires bloom) —
Thou abidest and reignest forever, O Queen
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen!
My one perfect mistress! my all things in all!
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call:
For the Seraphs have named thee to me in my sleep,
And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.
But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,
And its thoughts are the purest — belov'd, thou art there!
And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,
Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.
The world gave thee not to me, no! and the world
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have furl'd
The wings of my spirit about thy bright head;
At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.
Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art more.
And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.
If life be not that which without us we find —
Chance, accident, merely — but rather the mind,
And the soul which, within us, surviveth these things,
If our real existence have truly its springs
Less in that which we do than in that which we feel,
Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel!
For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,
Thou art mine — and mine only, — O life of my life!
And though many 's the slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,
Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
While there 's life on the lip, while there 's warmth in the wine,
One deep health I 'll pledge, and that health shall be thine!

II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose
Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes
Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,
And in fiery fusion commix'd earth and sky.

Time cool'd it, and calm'd it, and taught it to go
The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.
The wind changeth and whirleth continually:
All the rivers run down and run into the sea:
The wind whirleth about, and is presently still'd:
All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not fill'd:
The sun goeth forth from his chambers: the sun
Ariseth, and lo! he descendeth anon.
All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers
Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.
The great laws of life readjust their infraction,
And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,
To review the rash step he had taken, and feel
What the world would have call'd "*his erroneous position.*"
Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recognition:
Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out
On the coat which we once wore with pleasure, no doubt,
Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.
Ev'ry spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

IV.

He felt ill at ease with himself. He could feel
Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.
Her eyes, when they parted — her voice, when they met,
Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted. And yet,
Though, exulting, he deem'd himself loved, where he loved,
Through his mind a vague self-accusation there moved.
O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise
The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That his heart fail'd within him. In vain did he find
A thousand just reasons for what he had done:
The vision that troubled him would not be gone.

In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,
"Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth;
And her heart is too young to have deeply involved
All its hopes in the tie which must now be dissolved.
'T were a false sense of honor in me to suppress
The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess.
And what reason have I to presume this poor life
Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,
And without what alone might endear it to her,
Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,
Its withdrawal can wrong her?
It is not as though
I were bound to some poor village maiden, I know,
Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon earth,
Or to whose simple fortunes my own could give worth.
Matilda, in all the world's gifts, will not miss
Aught that I could procure her. 'T is best as it is!"

v.

In vain did he say to himself, "When I came
To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame
Or reproach myself for, in the thoughts of my heart.
I could not foresee that its pulses would start
Into such strange emotion on seeing once more
A woman I left with indifference before.
I believed, and with honest conviction believed,
In my love for Matilda. I never conceived
That another could shake it. I deem'd I had done
With the wild heart of youth, and looked hopefully on
To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,
Which I sought in the love that I vow'd to my wife.
Poor child! she shall learn the whole truth. She shall know
What I knew not myself but a few days ago.
The world will console her — her pride will support —
Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,
There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss
When once we have parted. 'T is best as it is!"

VI.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas!
He yet felt unconvinced that *'t was* best as it was.
Out of reach of all reason, forever would rise
That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That they harrow'd his heart and distracted his mind.

VII.

And then, when he turned from these thoughts to Lucile,
Though his heart rose enraptured, he could not but feel
A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind
All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,
Which he saw and revered in her, something unknown
And unseen in that nature still troubled his own.
He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized
Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,
In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,
Or completely possess'd, what, half hidden from view,
Remain'd lofty and lonely in *her*.
Then, her life,
So untamed, and so free! would she yield as a wife,
Independence, long claimed as a woman? Her name,
So link'd by the world with that spurious fame
Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,
In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt
In the serious thoughts of a man! . . . This reflection
O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejection,
From which he forever escaped to the thought
Doubt could reach not. . . . "I love her, and all else is naught!"

VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal
Of the letter which reach'd him at last from Lucile.
At the sight of the very first word that he read,
That letter dropp'd down from his hand like the dead

Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked and bare
A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.
He pass'd his hand hurriedly over his eyes,
Bewilder'd, incredulous. Angry surprise
And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him. Anon
He pick'd up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

"No, Alfred!
If over the present, when last
We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the past,
It hath now rolled away, and our two paths are plain,
And those two paths divide us.
"That hand which again
Mine one moment has clasp'd as the hand of a brother,
That hand and your honor are pledged to another!
Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet
For that moment (now past!) I have made you forget
What was due to yourself and that other one. Yes,
Mine the fault, and be mine the repentance! Not less,
In now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,
I foresaw not the sorrow involved in it.
"True,
That meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,
I alone! But oh, deem not it was with the thought
Or your heart to regain, or the past to rewaken.
No! believe me, it was with the firm and unshaken
Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be
Without peril to *you*, although haply to me
The salvation of all my existence.
"I own,
When the rumor first reach'd me, which lightly made known
To the world your engagement, my heart and my mind
Suffer'd torture intense. It was cruel to find
That so much of the life of my life, half unknown

To myself, had been silently settled on one
Upon whom but to think it would soon be a crime.
Then I said to myself, 'From the thraldom which time
Hath not weaken'd there rests but one hope of escape.
That image which Fancy seems ever to shape
From the solitude left round the ruins of yore,
Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.
What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone
Void of life, is the young hero born of my own
Perish'd youth: and his image, serene and sublime,
In my heart rests unconscious of change and of time.
Could I see it but once more, as time and as change
Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,
See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth
Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,
The hard pupil of life and the world: then, oh, then,
I should wake from a dream, and my life be again
Reconciled to the world; and, released from regret,
Take the lot fate accords to my choice.'

"So we met.
But the danger I did not foresee has occurr'd:
The danger, alas, to yourself! I have err'd.
But happy for both that this error hath been
Discover'd as soon as the danger was seen!
We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,
Shall be far from Serchon when this letter you read.
My course is decided; my path I discern:
Doubt is over; my future is fix'd now.

"Return,
O return to the young living love! Whence, alas!
If, one moment, you wander'd, think only it was
More deeply to bury the past love.

"And, oh!
Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go
On my far distant pathway through life, shall rejoice
To treasure in memory all that your voice
Has avow'd to me, all in which others have clothed
To my fancy with beauty and worth your betrothed!

In the fair morning light, in the orient dew
Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to renew
All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,
The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest youth?
Yes! *you* will be happy. I, too, in the bliss
I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this
Proves me worthy your friendship. And so — let it prove
That I cannot — I do not — respond to your love.
Yes, indeed! be convinced that I could not (no, no,
Never, never!) have render'd you happy. And so,
Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have plighted,
You would have endured, when the first brief, excited
Emotion was o'er, not alone the remorse
Of honor, but also (to render it worse)
Disappointed affection.

"Yes, Alfred; you start?
But think! if the world was too much in your heart,
And too little in mine, when we parted ten years
Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and tears!)
Have but deepen'd the old demarcations which then
Placed our natures asunder; and we two again,
As we then were, would still have been strangely at strife.
In that self-independence which is to my life
Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,
Had our course through the world been henceforth side by side,
I should have revolted forever, and shock'd,
Your respect for the world's plausibilities, mock'd,
Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those
Social creeds which you live by.

"Oh! do not suppose
That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are right.
Best, then, all as it is!

"Deem these words life's Good-night
To the hope of a moment: no more! If there fell
Any tear on this page, 't was a friend's.

"So farewell
To the past — and to you, Alfred Vargrave.

"LUCILE."

x.

So ended that letter.
The room seem'd to reel
Round and round in the mist that was scorching his eyes
With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise,
Half choked him ; each word he had read, as it smote
Down some hope, rose and grasp'd like a hand at his throat,
To stifle and strangle him.
Gasping already
For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,
He pass'd from his chamber. He felt both oppress'd
And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, pass'd
The long lime-trees of Serchon. His footsteps at last
Reach'd a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a wood:
It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.
By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,
Stood a small ruin'd abbey. He reach'd it, sat down
On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and thistle,
And read over again that perplexing epistle.

xi.

In re-reading that letter, there roll'd from his mind
The raw mist of resentment which first made him blind
To the pathos breath'd through it. Tears rose in his eyes,
And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seem'd to rise.
The truth which he saw not the first time he read
That letter, he now saw — that each word betray'd
The love which the writer had sought to conceal.
His love was received not, he could not but feel,
For one reason alone, — that his love was not free.
True ! free yet he was not: but could he not be
Free erelong, free as air to revoke that farewell,
And to sanction his own hopes ? he had but to tell
The truth to Matilda, and she were the first
To release him : he had but to wait at the worst.

"He saw, On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois"

Matilda's relations would probably snatch
Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match
In which they had yielded, alone at the whim
Of their spoil'd child, a languid approval to him.
She herself, careless child! was her love for him aught
Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought
She last gave to her doll? was she able to feel
Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile?
He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh! then,
He had but to fly to Lucile, and again
Claim the love which his heart would be free to command
But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,
Or even to seek, or to see her, before
He could say, "I am free! free, Lucile, to implore
That great blessing on life you alone can confer,"
'T were dishonor in him, 't would be insult to her.
Thus still with the letter outspread on his knee
He follow'd so fondly his own revery,
That he felt not the angry regard of a man
Fix'd upon him; he saw not a face stern and wan
Turn'd towards him; he heard not a footstep that pass'd
And repass'd the lone spot where he stood, till at last
A hoarse voice aroused him.
He look'd up and saw,
On the bare heath before him, the Duc de Luvois.

XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a look
Of concentrated insolent challenge, the Duke
Address'd to Lord Alfred some sneering allusion
To "the doubtless sublime reveries his intrusion
Had, he fear'd, interrupted. Milord would do better,
He fancied, however, to fold up a letter
The writing of which was too well known, in fact,
His remark as he pass'd to have failed to attract."

XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman was bent
Upon picking a quarrel! and doubtless 't was meant
From *him* to provoke it by sneers such as these.
A moment sufficed his quick instinct to seize
The position. He felt that he could not expose
His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's, to those
Idle tongues that would bring down upon him the ban
Of the world, if he now were to fight with this man.
And indeed, when he look'd in the Duke's haggard face,
He was pain'd by the change there he could not but trace.
And he almost felt pity.
He therefore put by
Each remark from the Duke with some careless reply,
And coldly, but courteously, waving away
The ill-humor the Duke seem'd resolved to display,
Rose, and turn'd, with a stern salutation, aside.

XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path, made one stride
In advance, raised a hand, fix'd upon him his eyes,
And said . . .
"Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with disguise!
I will own that I sought you a moment ago,
To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do so
Upon my excuse. I prefer to be frank.
I admit not a rival in fortune or rank
To the hand of a woman, whatever be hers
Or her suitor's. I love the Comtesse de Nevers.
I believed, ere you cross'd me, and still have the right
To believe, that she would have been mine. To her sight
You return, and the woman is suddenly changed.
You step in between us: her heart is estranged.
You! who now are betrothed to another, I know:
You! whose name with Lucile's nearly ten years ago

Was coupled by ties which you broke: you! the man
I reproach'd on the day our acquaintance began:
You! that left her so lightly, — I cannot believe
That you love, as I love, her; nor can I conceive
You, indeed, have the right so to love her.
Milord,
I will not thus tamely concede, at your word,
What, a few days ago, I believed to be mine!
I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in fine,
A rival you dare not despise. It is plain
That to settle this contest there can but remain
One way — need I say what it is?"

XV.

Not unmoved
With regretful respect for the earnestness proved
By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave replied
In words which he trusted might yet turn aside
The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,
And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain
To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst!)
Had not been accepted

XVI.

"Accepted! say first
Are you free to have offer'd?"
Lord Alfred was mute.

XVII.

"Ah, you dare not reply!" cried the Duke. "Why dispute,
Why palter with me? You are silent! and why?
Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny
'T was from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,
And the wish an ascendency lost to recall,
That you stepp'd in between me and her. If, milord,

You be really sincere, I ask only one word.
Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my part,
I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,
And there *can* be no quarrel between us. Say on!"
Lord Alfred grew gall'd and impatient. This tone
Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.
"You have not the right, sir," he said, "and still less
The power, to make terms and conditions with me.
I refuse to reply."

XVIII.

As diviners may see
Fates they cannot avert in some figure occult,
He foresaw in a moment each evil result
Of the quarrel now imminent.
There, face to face,
'Mid the ruins and tombs of a long-perish'd race,
With, for witness, the stern Autumn Sky overhead,
And beneath them, unnoticed, the graves, and the dead,
Those two men had met, as it were on the ridge
Of that perilous, narrow, invisible bridge
Dividing the Past from the Future, so small
That, if one should pass over, the other must fall.

XIX.

On the ear, at that moment, the sound of a hoof,
Urged with speed, sharply smote; and from under the roof
Of the forest in view, where the skirts of it verged
On the heath where they stood, at full gallop emerged
A horseman.
A guide he appear'd, by the sash
Of red silk round the waist, and the long leathern lash
With the short wooden handle, slung crosswise behind
The short jacket; the loose canvas trouser, confined
By the long boots; the woollen capote; and the rein,
A mere hempen cord on a curb.

Up the plain
He wheel'd his horse, white with the foam on his flank,
Leap'd the rivulet lightly, turn'd sharp from the bank,
And, approaching the Duke, raised his woollen capote,
Bow'd low in the selle, and deliver'd a note.

XX.

The two stood astonish'd. The Duke, with a gest
Of apology, turn'd, stretch'd his hand, and possess'd
Himself of the letter, changed color, and tore
The page open, and read.
Ere a moment was o'er
His whole aspect changed. A light rose to his eyes,
And a smile to his lips. While with startled surprise
Lord Alfred yet watch'd him, he turn'd on his heel,
And said gayly, "A pressing request from Lucile!
You are quite right, Lord Alfred! fair rivals at worst,
Our relative place may perchance be reversed.
You are not accepted — nor free to propose!
I, perchance, am accepted already; who knows?
I had warn'd you, milord, I should still persevere.
This letter — but stay! you can read it — look here!"

XXI.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and enraged.
But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged
By aught that could sanction resentment. He said
Not a word, but turn'd round, took the letter, and read . . .

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO THE DUC DE LUVOIS.

"SAINT SAVIOUR.

"Your letter, which follow'd me here, makes me stay
Till I see you again. With no moment's delay
I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel
Or profess, to come to me directly.

"LUCILE."

XXII.

"Your letter!" He then had been writing to her!
Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said, "Sir,
Do not let me detain you!"
The Duke smiled and bow'd;
Placed the note in his bosom; address'd, half aloud,
A few words to the messenger. . . . "Say your despatch
Will be answer'd ere nightfall"; then glanced at his watch,
And turn'd back to the Baths.

XXIII.

Alfred Vargrave stood still,
Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.
He turn'd to Lucile's farewell letter to him,
And read over her words; rising tears made them dim;
"*Doubt is over: my future is fix'd now,*" they said,
"*My course is decided.*" Her course? what! to wed
With this insolent rival! With that thought there shot
Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But not
Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite excuse
Those strange words to the Duke. She was free to refuse
Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true:
Even then, though, this eager and strange rendezvous
How imprudent! To some unfrequented lone inn,
And so late (for the night was about to begin) —
She, companionless there! — had she bidden that man?
A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran
Through his heart.

XXIV.

At that moment he look'd up, and saw,
Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,
Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.
The day was descending. He felt 't would be night
Ere that man reached Saint Saviour.

XXV.

He walk'd on, but not
Back toward Serchon: he walk'd on, but knew not in what
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,
He was walking; but still he walk'd on without heed.

XXVI.

The day had been sullen; but, towards his decline,
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.
Darkly denting the red light reveal'd at its back,
The old ruin'd abbey rose roofless and black.
The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven floor
Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of yore,
The sight of that refuge where, back to its God
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest
That now prey'd on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast
With varying impulse divided and torn,
He traversed the scant heath, and reach'd the forlorn
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so
He too enter'd. The light waned around him, and pass'd
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,
As the last light of day from the high wood declined,
And the great forest sigh'd its farewell to the beam,
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy grace!
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with him lightly
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly

Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou inclinest,
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor divinest.
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him love thee;
But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot move thee;
And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost thou?
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,
And thou laughest and toyest with any new comer,
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart under
That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!
For all those — the young, and the fair, and the strong,
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and long,
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their deeds
And their days are forgotten! O hast thou no weeds
And not one year of mourning, — one out of the many
That deck thy new bridals forever, — nor any
Regrets for thy lost loves, conceal'd from the new,
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these things,
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

"The huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,
And eltrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!
The castle betokens a date long gone by.
He crosses the courtyard with curious eye:
He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet
From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are set;
And the whole place grows wilder and wilder, and less
Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,
Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise,
Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;
Strange epigraphs, blazon'd, burn out of the wall:

The spell of a wizard is over it all.
In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping
The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.
If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover
Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover:
If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore
Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.
But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her cheek!
And how sweet must that voice be, if once she would speak!
He looks and he loves her; but knows he (not he!)
The clew to unravel this old mystery?
And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on the wall,
The mute men in armor around him, and all
The weird figures frown, as though striving to say,
'Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-day!
And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast
To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possess'd
By an Age not thine own!'

"But unconscious is he,
And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see
Aught but *one* form before him!

"Rash, wild words are o'er,
And the vision is vanish'd from sight evermore!
And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves
O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves
Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.
Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme
Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart."
And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;
Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the young
And the tale to each heart unto which it is known
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part
From strong physical health, and that vigor of heart

Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,
From a generous vanity native to France,
With the heart of a hunter, whatever the quarry,
Pursued it, too hotly impatient to tarry
Or turn, till he took it. His trophies were trifles:
But trifler he was not. When rose-leaves it rifles,
No less than when oak-trees it ruins, the wind
Its pleasure pursues with impetuous mind.
Both Eugène de Luvois and Lord Alfred had been
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which, seen
Floating faint, in the sunshine of Alfred's soft mood,
Seem'd amiable foibles, by Luvois pursued
With impetuous passion, seemed semi-Satanic.
Half pleased you see brooks play with pebbles; in panic
You watch them whirl'd down by the torrent.
In truth,
To the sacred political creed of his youth
The century which he was born to denied
All realization. Its generous pride
To degenerate protest on all things was sunk;
Its principles each to a prejudice shrunk.
Down the path of a life that led nowhere he trod,
Where his whims were his guides, and his will was his god,
And his pastime his purpose.
From boyhood possess'd
Of inherited wealth, he had learn'd to invest
Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from the cage
Which penury locks, in each vice of an age
All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,
Were to him illegitimate.
Thus, he appear'd
To the world what the world chose to have him appear,—
The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere
Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages! Still
'T was this vigor of nature, and tension of will,
That found for the first time — perhaps for the last —
In Lucile what they lacked yet to free from the Past,
Force, and faith, in the Future.

And so, in his mind,
To the anguish of losing the woman was join'd
The terror of missing his life's destination,
Which in her had its mystical representation.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, pass'd
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight rode fast.
As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and scares
Some traveller stray'd in the waste unawares,
So that thought more than once darken'd over his heart
For a moment, and rapidly seem'd to depart.
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which rose
Up the shaggy hillside: and the quarrelling crows
Clang'd above him, and clustering down the dim air
Dropp'd into the dark woods. By fits here and there
Shepherd fires faintly gleam'd from the valleys. Oh, how
He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent
From the torrent — before him a sound from the tracts
Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,
And the loose earth and loose stones roll'd momently down
From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.
The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,
And the Powers of the night through the vast solitudes
Walk'd abroad and conversed with each other. The trees
Were in sound and in motion, and mutter'd like seas
In Elfland. The road through the forest was hollow'd.
On he sped through the darkness, as though he were follow'd
Fast, fast by the Erl King!
The wild wizard-work
Of the forest at last open'd sharp, o'er the fork
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems
Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleam'd like gems,

Broke the broad moon above the voluminous
Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!
With his horse reeking white, he at last reach'd the door
Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,
Through which, ever roaring, there leap'd o'er the limb
Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight,
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above
In a glimmering casement a shade seem'd to move.
At the door the old negress was nodding her head
As he reach'd it. "My mistress awaits you," she said.
And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter
He follow'd her silent. A few moments after,
His heart almost stunn'd him, his head seem'd to reel,
For a door closed — Luvois was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair unconfined
Streaming o'er it, and toss'd now and then by the wind
From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a spire
From a brass lamp before her — a faint hectic fire
On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever:
They seem'd to have wept themselves wider than ever,
Those dark eyes — so dark and so deep!
"You relent?
And your plans have been changed by the letter I sent?"
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong inward strife.

LUCILE.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threatens man's life —
Woman's honor.

LUVOIS.

The last, madam, *not!*

LUCILE.

Both. I glance
At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood of France,
As I read them! You say in this letter . . .
"*I know*
Why now you refuse me; 't is (is it not so?)
For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,
And now trifles again with the heart you deny
To myself. But he shall not! By man's last wild law,
I will seize on the right (the *right*, Duc de Luvois!)
To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give
To the future its freedom. That man shall not live
To make you as wretched as you have made me!"

LUVOIS.

Well, madam, in those words what word do you see
That threatens the honor of woman?

LUCILE.

See! . . . what,
What word, do you ask? Every word! would you not,
Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your name
Was soil'd and dishonor'd by more than mere shame
If the woman that bore it had first been the cause
Of the crime which in these words is menaced? You pause?
Woman's honor, you ask? Is there, sir, no dishonor
In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,
Can shudder, and say, "In that smile is a grave"?
No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you have
In the contest you menace. That contest but draws
Every right into ruin. By all human laws
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities
Of man's social honor!
The Duke droop'd his eyes.
"I obey you," he said, "but let woman beware
How she plays fast and loose thus with human despair,
And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was the right

When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope quite,
But you should from the first have done this, for I feel
That you knew from the first that I loved you."
Lucile
This sudden reproach seem'd to startle.
She raised
A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed
On them silent awhile. His own looks were downcast.
Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was now pass'd,
Pity crept, and perchance o'er her conscience a tear,
Falling softly, awoke it.
However severe,
Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to her?
Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,
Which had seem'd, even when most impassion'd it seem'd,
Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she deem'd
That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,
So proud of the place the world gave him, held furl'd
In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide
Might tug, till it snapp'd, that erect lofty pride?
Were those elements in him, which once roused to strife
Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole life?
There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength of the river,
Which through continents pushes its pathway forever
To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.
The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws
The river's life into its own life, by laws
Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is this:
The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore;
Its sources are infinite; still to the shore,
With no diminution of pride, it will say,
"I am here; I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!"

Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,
Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been
Stern or haughty departed; and, humbled in mien,
She approach'd him, and brokenly murmur'd, as though
To herself more than him, "Was I wrong? is it so?
Hear me, Duke! you must feel that, whatever you deem
Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem
I may claim on *one* ground — I at least am sincere.
You say that to me from the first it was clear
That you loved me. But what if this knowledge were known
At a moment in life when I felt most alone,
And least able to be so? a moment, in fact,
When I strove from one haunting regret to retract
And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil
Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you still
So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,
If I hoped to see all this, or deem'd that I saw
For a moment the promise of this, in the plighted
Affection of one who, in nature, united
So much that from others affection might claim,
If only affection were free? Do you blame
The hope of that moment? I deem'd my heart free
From all, saving sorrow. I deem'd that in me
There was yet strength to mould it once more to my will,
To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still
Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain
From hope? alas! I too then hoped!"

LUVOIS.

Oh, again,
Yet again, say that thrice blessèd word! say, Lucile,
That you then deign'd to hope —

LUCILE.

Yes! to hope I could feel,
And could give to you, that without which, all else given
Were but to deceive, and to injure you even: —
A heart free from thoughts of another. Say, then,
Do you blame that one hope?

LUVOIS.

O Lucile!

"Say again,"
She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,
"Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own
To my heart that the hope it had cherish'd was o'er,
And forever, I said to you then, 'Hope no more'?
I myself hoped no more!"
With but ill-suppress'd wrath
The Duke answer'd . . . "What, then! he recrosses your path
This man, and you have but to see him, despite
Of his troth to another, to take back that light
Worthless heart to your own, which he wrong'd years ago!"
Lucile faintly, brokenly murmur'd . . . "No! no!
'T is not that — but alas! — but I cannot conceal
That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel
That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part, —
In return for what . . . ah, Duke, what is it? . . . a heart
Which is only a ruin!"
With words warm and wild,
"Though a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild
And restore it," Luvois cried; "though ruin'd it be,
Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!"
He approach'd her. She shrank back. The grief in her eyes
Answer'd, "No!"
An emotion more fierce seem'd to rise
And to break into flame, as though fired by the light
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaim'd, "Am I right?
You reject *me!* accept *him?*"

"I have not done so,"
She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed, "Not yet — no!
But can you with accents as firm promise me
That you will not accept him?"
"Accept? Is he free?
Free to offer?" she said.
"You evade me, Lucile,"
He replied; "ah, you will not avow what you feel!
He might make himself free? Oh, you blush — turn away!
Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!
While you deign to reply to one question from me?
I may hope not, you tell me: but tell me, may he?
What! silent? I alter my question. If quite
Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then?"
"He might,"
She said softly.

VI.

Those two whisper'd words, in his breast,
As he heard them, in one maddening moment release
All that 's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush
And extinguish in man all that 's good. In the rush
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste
And darken and devastate intellect, chased
From its realm human reason. The wild animal
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to pierce
And to rend, rush'd upon him; fierce jealousy, swell'd
By all passions bred from it, and ever impell'd
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,
And on others inflict its own pangs!
At that minute
What pass'd through his mind, who shall say? who may tell
The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red glare of hell
Can illumine alone?
He stared wildly around
That lone place, so lonely! That silence! no sound

Reach'd that room, through the dark evening air, save drear
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near!
It was midnight all round on the weird silent weather;
Deep midnight in him! They two, — lone and together,
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him!
The triumph and bliss of his rival flash'd o'er him.
The abyss of his own black despair seem'd to ope
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope
Which Dante read over the city of doom.
All the Tarquin pass'd into his soul in the gloom,
And, uttering words he dared never recall,
Words of insult and menace, he thunder'd down all
The brew'd storm-cloud within him: its flashes scorch'd blind
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control;
A torrent seem'd loosen'd within him. His soul
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hiss'd
And seeth'd in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had miss'd
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place
Where he rested o'erawed: a saint's scorn on her face;
Such a dread *vade retro* was written in light
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that sight,
Have sunk back abash'd to perdition. I know
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had look'd so,
She had needed no dagger next morning.
She rose
And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is gone,
And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.
There she paused; and, as though from immeasurable,
Insurpassable distance, she murmur'd —

"She rose, And swept to the door.

"Farewell!
We, alas! have mistaken each other. Once more
Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.
Duc de Luvois, adieu!"
From the heart-breaking gloom
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,
He felt she was gone — gone forever!

IX.

No word,
The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen accusation
As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,
In which he remain'd.
"O return; I repent!"
He exclaim'd; but no sound through the stillness was sent,
Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet humm'd her night-hymn:
An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning prayer.
"Return," sung the wandering insect. The roar
Of the waters replied, "Nevermore! nevermore!"
He walk'd to the window. The spray on his brow
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water below;
The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound
Of the torrent. The mountains gloom'd sullenly round.
A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.
O'er the dim balustrade all bewilder'd he hung,
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink
Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and listing
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquish'd
His unconscious employment, that light was extinguish'd.
Wheels, at last, from the inn door aroused him. He ran
Down the stairs; reached the door — just to see her depart
Down the mountain the carriage was speeding.

X.

His heart
Pealed the knell of its last hope. He rush'd on; but whither
He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the shelf
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself!
Till, exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and moss
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside. He sank
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them. He knew
That the night had divided his whole life in two.
Behind him a Past that was over forever;
Before him a Future devoid of endeavor
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,
Of the other a fear. What remain'd to be done?
Whither now should he turn? Turn again, as before,
To his old easy, careless existence of yore
He could not. He felt that for better or worse
A change had pass'd o'er him; an angry remorse
Of his own frantic failure and error had marr'd
Such a refuge forever. The future seem'd barr'd
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread
To attain it. Life's wilderness round him was spread.
What clew there to cling by?
He clung by a name
To a dynasty fallen forever. He came
Of an old princely house, true through change to the race
And the sword of Saint Louis — a faith 't were disgrace
To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneel'd
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard field
With the Crescent) become, ere it reach'd him, tradition;
A mere faded badge of a social position;
A thing to retain and say nothing about,
Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from doubt.
Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of his youth

Wholly fail'd the strong needs of his manhood, in truth!
And beyond them, what region of refuge? what field
For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,
In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?
Blind deliriums, bewilder'd and endless distraction!
Not even a desert, not even the cell
Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell
The wild devil-instincts which now, unreprest,
Ran riot through that ruin'd world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight
Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of night
O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There
As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him prayer;
But what had he to pray to?
The winds in the woods,
The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,
Were in commune all round with the invisible Power
That walk'd the dim world by Himself at that hour.
But their language he had not yet learn'd — in despite
Of the much he *had* learn'd — or forgotten it quite,
With its once native accents. Alas! what had he
To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony
Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence. His will,
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild
At its work of destruction within him. The child
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,
His own devil.
He sat on the damp mountain sod,
And stared sullenly up at the dark sky.
The clouds
Had heap'd themselves over the bare west in crowds
Of misshapen, incongruous potents. A green
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge

Of the grim world, gleam'd ghastly, as under some bridge,
Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown
And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands
Dismantled and rent; and reveal'd, through a loop
In the breach'd dark, the blemish'd and half-broken hoop
Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,
Darken'd round him. One object alone — that gray cross —
Glimmer'd faint on the dark. Gazing up, he descried
Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretch'd wide,
As though to embrace him.
He turn'd from the sight,
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light
Of the dawn grayly flicker'd and glared on the spent
Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent
To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,
He was sullenly riding across the dark forest
Toward Serchon.
Thus riding, with eyes of defiance
Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance
With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived
Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-leaved
Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his way,
The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray
With the gray glare of morning. Eugène de Luvois,
With the sense of a strange second sight, when he saw
That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,
By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes
Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,
With a stern sad inquiry fix'd keenly on him
And, to meet it, a lie leap'd at once to his own;

A lie born of that lying darkness now grown
Over all in his nature! He answer'd that gaze
With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys
More intensely than words what a man means, convey'd
Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which said,
"*I have triumph'd. The question your eyes would imply*
Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!"
And so he rode by,
And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,
By one wild hope impell'd, by one wild fear pursued,
And led by one instinct, which seem'd to exclude
From his mind every human sensation, save one —
The torture of doubt — had stray'd moodily on,
Down the highway deserted, that evening in which
With the Duke he had parted; stray'd on, through rich
Haze of sunset, or into the gradual night,
Which darken'd, unnoticed, the land from his sight,
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect of all
The wild scenery round him avail to recall
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had hung
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipp'd on fire from among
The rent vapors, and sunk o'er the ridge of the world.
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him unfurl'd,
In one moment of splendor, the leagues of dark trees,
And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the face

Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the place
Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This same track
The Duke must have traversed, perforce, to get back
To Serchon; not yet then the Duke had return'd!
He listen'd, he look'd up the dark, but discern'd
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.
He knew that the night was approaching to day.
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and forlorn,
Reveal'd to him, riding toward Serchon, the Duke.
'T was then that the two men exchanged look for look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rush'd on. He tore
His path through the thicket. He reach'd the inn door,
Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubb'd his eyes.
The Countess was gone. And the Duke?
The man stared
A sleepy inquiry.
With accents that scared
The man's dull sense awake, "He, the stranger," he cried,
"Who had been there that night!"
The man grinn'd and replied,
With a vacant intelligence, "He, oh ay, ay!
He went after the lady."
No further reply
Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no more,
Flung a coin to the man, and so turn'd from the door.
"What! the Duke then the night in that lone inn had pass'd?
In that lone inn — with her!" Was that look he had cast

When they met in the forest, that look which remain'd
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explain'd?

XVII.

The day was half turn'd to the evening, before
He re-enter'd Serchon, with a heart sick and sore.
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,
By their voices attracted, distinguished the Duke,
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.
Right
Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift sombre stride,
Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turn'd, stepp'd aside,
And, cordially grasping his hand, whisper'd low,
"O, how right have you been! There can never be — no,
Never — any more contest between us! Milord,
Let us henceforth be friends!"
Having utter'd that word,
He turn'd lightly round on his heel, and again
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that train
Of his young imitators.
Lord Alfred stood still,
Rooted, stunn'd to the spot. He felt weary and ill,
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the soul
With a dull, stifling anguish he could not control.
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the crowd,
The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud
Some comment upon his gay humor that day?
He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?
'T is, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune,
Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn
Has at last found a Mars — who, of course, shall be nameless,
The vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blameless!
Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs
All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucile de Nevers
With the Duke 's coupled gayly, in some laughing, light,

Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did there roll
Back again, back again, on its smooth downward course
O'er his nature, with gather'd momentum and force,
THE WORLD.

XIX.

"No!" he mutter'd, "she cannot have sinn'd!
True! women there are (self-named women of mind!)
Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes!
To choose and to leave — than the legalized stress
Of the lovingest marriage. But she — is she so?
I will not believe it. Lucile? O no, no!
Not Lucile!
"But the world? and, ah, what would it say?
O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!
The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!
She is right! no, we could not be happy. 'T is best
As it is. I will write to her — write, O my heart!
And accept her farewell. *Our* farewell! must we part —
Part thus, then — forever, Lucile? Is it so?
Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.
'T was a dream! we must waken!"

XX.

With head bow'd, as though
By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow
Moody footsteps, he turned to his inn.
Drawn apart
From the gate, in the court-yard, and ready to start,

Postboys mounted, portmanteaus pack'd up and made fast,
A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he pass'd.
He order'd his horse to be ready anon:
Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly pass'd on,
And ascended the staircase, and enter'd his room.
It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom
Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light,
On the mantel-piece; there a large card caught his sight—
A large card, a stout card, well printed and plain,
Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.
It gave a respectable look to the slab
That it lay on. The name was—

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,
For 't was that of his own future uncle-in-law,
Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known
As wearing the longest philacteried gown
Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of;
A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the most of
This world and the next; having largely invested
Not only where treasure is never molested
By thieves, moth, or rust; but on this earthly ball
Where interest was high, and security small,
Of mankind there was never a theory yet
Not by some individual instance upset:
And so to that sorrowful verse of the Psalm
Which declares that the wicked expand like the palm
In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,

A cheering exception did Ridley present.
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prosper'd his piety.
The leader of every religious society,
Christian knowledge he labor'd through life to promote
With personal profit, and knew how to quote
Both the Stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,
A waiter his head through the doorway protruded;
"Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wish'd to speak."
Alfred Vargrave could feel there were tears on his cheek;
He brush'd them away with a gesture of pride.
He glanced at the glass; when his own face he eyed,
He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said
"Sir Ridley may enter."
In three minutes more
That benign apparition appear'd at the door.
Sir Ridley, released for a while from the cares
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,
In company there with his sister and niece,
Found himself now at Serchon — distributing tracts
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts
For Exeter Hall; he was starting that night
For Bigorre: he had heard, to his cordial delight,
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting out
For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!
Here some commonplace compliments as to "the marriage"
Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage
Was ready. A storm seem'd to threaten the weather;
If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down

Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause
And a slight hesitation, the which seem'd to cause
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answer'd — "My dear
Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here —
Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair
Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare
My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),
Before I accept your kind offer."
"Why not?"
Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before
Sir Ridley observed it, had pass'd through the door.
A few moments later, with footsteps revealing
Intense agitation of uncontroll'd feeling,
He was rapidly pacing the garden below.
What pass'd through his mind then is more than I know.
But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,
In the court-yard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread
Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face
Betray'd there the least agitation. "The place
You so kindly have offer'd," he said, "I accept."
And he stretch'd out his hand. The two travellers stepp'd
Smiling into the carriage.
And thus, out of sight,
They drove down the dark road, and into the night.

XXII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,
"We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!"
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply with us
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two men
Began to converse, somewhat drowsily, when
Alfred suddenly thought — "Here 's a man of ripe age,
At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,
Who looks happy, and therefore who must have been wise:
Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes

Some few of the reasons which make me believe
That I neither am happy nor wise? 't would relieve
And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and doubt."
For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.
It was snapp'd up at once.
"What is truth?" jesting Pilate
Ask'd, and pass'd from the question at once with a smile at
Its utter futility. Had he address'd it
To Ridley MacNab, he at least had confess'd it
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man
Could more promptly have answer'd the sceptical Roman
Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,
And forthwith on the pavement he 'll sketch you the scheme
Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his theme!
Not afraid of La Place, nor of Arago, he!
He 'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.
Here 's you sun — call him A; B 's the moon; it is clear
How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask La Place,
(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to face!)
Their science in plain A B C to accord
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a word
Will you get for your pains from their sad lips. Alas!
Not a drop from the bottle that 's quite full will pass.
'T is the half-empty vessel that freest emits
The water that 's in it. 'T is thus with men's wits;
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability
Of imparting to others a truth with facility
Is proportion'd forever with painful exactness
To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight
Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate
More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,
And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms;
But if every street charity shook an investment,
Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vestment,
The length of the process would limit the act;

"MATILDA SPRANG TO HIM, AT ONCE"

And therefore the truth that 's summ'd up in a tract
Is most lightly dispensed.
As for Alfred, indeed,
On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffer'd to feed
By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,
That the two men thus talking continued to go
Onward somehow, together — on into the night —
The midnight — in which they escape from our sight.

XXIII.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its place,
And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy space
Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of sight,
To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night;
And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,
In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.
And the world laugh'd.
It wanted but two rosy hours
From the noon, when they pass'd through the thick passion flowers
Of the little wild garden that dimpled before
The small house where their carriage now stopp'd, at Bigorre.
And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the dew,
With her white morning robe flitting joyously through
The dark shrubs with which the soft hillside was clothed,
Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his betrothed.
Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,
That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.
And he murmur'd, or sigh'd, "O, how could I have stray'd
From this sweet child, or suffer'd in aught to invade
Her young claim on my life, though it were for an hour
The thought of another?"

"Look up, my sweet flower!"
He whisper'd her softly, "my heart unto thee
Is return'd, as returns to the rose the wild bee!"
"And will wander no more?" laugh'd Matilda.
"No more,"
He repeated. And, low to himself, "Yes, 't is o'er!
My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind
To have dream'd that these clever Frenchwomen of mind
Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,
Or sympathize with it?"

XXIV.

And here the first part
Of this drama is over. The curtain falls furl'd
On the actors within it — the Heart, and the World.
Woo'd and wooer have play'd with the riddle of life, —
Have they solved it?
Appear! answer, Husband and Wife!

XXV.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

THE COMTESSE DE NEVERS TO A FRIEND IN INDIA.

"Once more, O my friend, to your arms and your heart,
And the places of old . . . never, never to part!
Once more to the palm, and the fountain! Once more
To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of yore!
From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret
Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set;
From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,
There is no strength to bear them — old Time is *so* old!
From the world's weary masters, that come upon earth
Sapp'd and mined by the fever they bear from their birth;
From the men of small stature, mere parts of a crowd,

Born too late, when the strength of the world hath been bow'd;
Back, — back to the orient, from whose sunbright womb
Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the bloom
And the beauty of times that are faded forever!
To the palms! to the tombs! to the still Sacred River!
Where I too, the child of a day that is done,
First leapt into life, and look'd up at the sun.
Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home
I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come!
Are the three intense stars, that we watch'd night by night
Burning broad on the band of Orion, as bright?
Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,
When, as children, we gather'd the moonbeams for gold?
Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still
Remember the free games we play'd on the hill,
Mid those huge stones up-heap'd, where we recklessly trod
O'er the old ruin'd fane of the old ruin'd god?
How he frown'd, while around him we carelessly play'd!
That frown on my life ever after hath stay'd,
Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast
From some vague supernatural grief in the past.
For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he frown'd,
To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had found,
In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss
Which his science divine seem'd divinely to miss.
Alas! you may haply remember me yet
The free child, whose glad childhood myself I forget.
I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest:
I bear to you only a laboring breast:
My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurl'd
O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a world.
The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:
It is flown, and returns not, though many a day
Have I watch'd from the windows of life for its coming.
Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.
I know not what Ararat rises for me
Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:
I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,

Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills:
But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my breast
Wakes and whispers me on — to the East! to the East!
Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or find
The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of mind?
Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?
Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?
Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent?
Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent?
To a voice who shall render an image? or who
From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew?
I have burn'd out within me the fuel of life.
Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet after strife.
I would sleep for a while. I am weary.

"My friend,
I had meant in these lines to regather, and send
To our old home, my life's scatter'd links. But 't is vain!
Each attempt seems to shatter the chaplet again;
Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,
Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore
Whence too far I have wander'd.

"How many long years
Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching tears,
While I wrote to you, splash'd out a girl's premature
Moans of pain at what women in silence endure!
To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes alone,
That now long-faded page of my life hath been shown
Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you know,
Many years since, — how many!

"A few months ago
I seem'd reading it backward, that page! Why explain
Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose again.
The old superstition! the idol of old!
It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould
Is not to the forest more lost than to me
That emotion. I bury it here by the sea
Which will bear me anon far away from the shore
Of a land which my footsteps shall visit no more.

And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.
Hark! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the wave,
Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home!
I come, O you whispering voices, I come!
My friend, ask me nothing.

"Receive me alone
As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone
In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring:
It may be an angel that, weary of wing,
Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,
Or only a wayfarer stray'd in the gloom.
This only I know: that in Europe at least
Lives the craft or the power that must master our East.
Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves yield at last?
Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.
The gods of the household Time thrusts from the shelf;
And I seem as unreal and weird to myself
As those idols of old.

"Other times, other men,
Other men, other passions!

"So be it! yet again
I turn to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,
And the light of those lands where the great sun is born!
Spread your arms, O my friend! on your breast let me feel
The repose which hath fled from my own.

"Your LUCILE

PART II.

CANTO I.

I.

Hail, Muse! But each Muse by this time has, I know,
Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray! — not Lindley, — but Murray and Son.
Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!
In Albemarle Street may thy temple long stand!
Long enlighten'd and led by thine erudite hand,
May each novice in science nomadic unravel
Statistical mazes of modernized travel!
May each inn-keeping knave long thy judgments revere,
And the postboys of Europe regard thee with fear;
While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that portion
Of the national soil which the Greek exile took
In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book
Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy wit
Not to pay through his nose just for following it!
May'st thou long, O instructor! preside o'er his way,
And teach him alike what to praise and to pay!
Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again
I invoke, lest, unskill'd, I should wander in vain.
To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse
Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse;
For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems
Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.
Yes! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John Murray!
And I start — with thy book — for the Baths in a hurry.

II.

"At Coblentz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine,
And from thence the road, winding by Ehrenbreitstein,
Passes over the frontier of Nassau.
("N. B.
No custom-house here since the Zollverein." See
Murray, paragraph 30.)
"The route, at each turn,
Here the lover of nature allows to discern,
In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale:
The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail
In the foilage observable here; and, moreover,
The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover
Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that hems
Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller to —
"EMS.
A Schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.
At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you pay
Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur
Is attach'd to the place; but most travellers prefer
(Including, indeed, many persons of note)
To dine at the usual-priced table d'hôte.
Through the town runs the Lahn, the steep green banks of
which
Two rows of white picturesque houses enrich;
And between the high road and the river is laid
Out a sort of a garden, call'd 'THE Promenade.'
Female visitors here, who may make up their mind
To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find
On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day long,
Troops of donkeys — sure-footed — proverbially strong";
And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he passes,
Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these springs
In the month when the merle on the maple-bough sings,

Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths
By a similar sickness, there came to the baths
Four sufferers — each stricken deep through the heart.
Or the head, by the selfsame invisible dart
Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,
From the sickness that walketh unseen in the moon,
Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each
Infects with his own sores the next within reach.
First of these were a young English husband and wife,
Grown weary ere half through the journey of life.
O Nature, say where, thou gray mother of earth,
Is the strength of thy youth? that thy womb brings to birth
Only old men to-day! On the winds, as of old,
Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold;
Thy forests are green as of yore; and thine oceans
Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions:
But man — thy last birth and thy best — is no more
Life's free lord, that look'd up to the starlight of yore,
With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the eyes,
The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the skies;
But a gray-headed infant, defrauded of youth,
Born too late or too early.
The lady, in truth,
Was young, fair, and gentle; and never was given
To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.
Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold
Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand unroll'd
From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose,
An Aurora, at dawn, from her balmy repose,
And into the mirror the bloom and the blush
Of her beauty broke, glowing; like light in a gush
From the sunrise in summer.
Love, roaming, shall meet
But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet —
Eyes brighter — brows whiter — a figure more fair —
Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair —
Than thine, Lady Alfred! And here I aver
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err)

MATILDA.

That not all the oysters in Britain contain
A pearl pure as thou art.
Let some one explain,—
Who may know more than I of the intimate life
Of the pearl with the oyster, — why yet in his wife,
In despite of her beauty — and most when he felt
His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt —
Lord Alfred miss'd something he sought for : indeed,
The more that he miss'd it the greater the need ;
Till it seem'd to himself he could willingly spare
All the charms that he found for the one charm not there.

IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands
The worth of their full usufruct at our hands.
And the value of all things exists, not indeed
In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's need.
Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with beauty and youth,
Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet in truth
Unfulfill'd the ambition, and sterile the wealth
(In a life paralyzed by a moral ill-health),
Had remain'd, while the beauty and youth, unredeem'd
From a vague disappointment at all things, but seem'd
Day by day to reproach him in silence for all
That lost youth in himself they had fail'd to recall.
No career had he follow'd, no object obtain'd
In the world by those worldly advantages gain'd
From nuptials beyond which once seem'd to appear,
Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.
All that glitter'd and gleam'd through the moonlight of youth
With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth
Grasp'd and gather'd it, seem'd like that false fairy gold
Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and mould !

V.

Fairy gold ! moss and leaves ! and the young Fairy Bride ?
Lived there yet fairy-lands in the face at his side ?

Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watch'd
Some pale and impalpable vapor, detach'd
From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall
O'er the light of a sweet serene star, until all
The chill'd splendor reluctantly waned in the deep
Of its own native heaven? Even so seem'd to creep
O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,
While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,
Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil
Of a sadness unconscious.
The lady grew pale
As silent her lord grew: and both, as they eyed
Each the other askance, turn'd, and secretly sigh'd.
Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can give?
True, we know what life is — but, alas! do we live?
The grammar of life we have gotten by heart,
But life's self we have made a dead language — an art,
Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 't was spoken
When the silence of passion the first time was broken!
Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no doubt:
But the last man, at best, was but learnéd about
What the first, without learning *enjoy'd*. What art thou
To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?
A science. What wert thou to him that from ocean
First beheld thee appear? A surprise, — an emotion!
When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the heart,
When it thrills as it fills every animate part,
Where lurks it? how works it? . . . we scarcely detect it.
But life goes: the heart dies: haste, O leech, and dissect it!
This accurséd æsthetical, ethical age
Hath so finger'd life's hornbook, so blurr'd every page,
That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous story
With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,
Is turn'd to a tedious instruction, not new
To the children that read it insipidly through.
We know too much of Love ere we love. We can trace
Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face
When we see it at last. 'T is the same little Cupid,

With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile almost stupid,
We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our shelves,
And copied a hundred times over, ourselves.
And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
Still, that horrible sense of the *déja connu!*

VI.

Perchance 't was the fault of the life that they led;
Perchance 't was the fault of the novels they read;
Perchance 't was a fault in themselves; I am bound not
To say: this I know — that these two creatures found not
In each other some sign they expected to find
Of a something unnamed in the heart or the mind;
And, missing it, each felt a right to complain
Of a sadness which each found no word to explain.
Whatever it was, the world noticed not it
In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.
Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 't is the case,
Each must speak to the crown with a mask on his face.
Praise follow'd Matilda wherever she went.
She was flatter'd. Can flattery purchase content?
Yes. While to its voice, for a moment, she listen'd,
The young cheek still bloom'd, and the soft eyes still glisten'd;
And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid things
That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings
Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved
Through that buzz of inferior creatures, which proved
Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot
'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that was not:
And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bow'd,
(As they turn'd to each other, each flush'd from the crowd,)
And murmur'd those praises which yet seem'd more dear
Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,
She, too, ceased awhile her own fate to regret:
"Yes! . . he loves me," she sigh'd; "this is love, then —
and *yet* — *!*"

VII.

Ah, that *yet!* fatal word! 't is the moral of all
Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since the Fall!
It stands at the end of each sentence we learn;
It flits in the vista of all we discern;
It leads us, forever and ever, away
To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.
'T was this same little fatal and mystical word
That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord
To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah;
Drooping pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara!

VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the same,
To these waters two other worn pilgrims there came:
One a man, one a woman: just now, at the latter,
As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her
And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

IX.

Of the self-crown'd young kings of the Fashion in France
Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,
Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so bright,
Who so hailed in the salon, so mark'd in the Bois,
Who so welcomed by all, as Eugène de Luvois?
Of all the smooth-brow'd premature debauchees
In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees
On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere graven,—
In Paris I mean, — where the streets are all paven
By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the way
From Hell to this planet, — who, haughty and gay,
The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,
Walk'd that causeway as bold as Eugène de Luvois?
Yes! he march'd through the great masquerade, loud of tongue,

Bold of brow: but the motley he mask'd in, it hung
So loose, trail'd so wide, and appear'd to impede
So strangely at times the vex'd effort at speed,
That a keen eye might guess it was made — not for him,
But some brawler more stalwart of stature and limb.
That it irk'd him, in truth, you at times could divine,
For when low was the music, and spilt was the wine,
He would clutch at the garment, as though it oppress'd
And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

X.

What! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease!
Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease?
My friend, hear a parable: ponder it well:
For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.
One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,
And there, while I laugh'd at Grassot and Arnal,
My eye fell on the face of a man at my side;
Every time that he laugh'd I observed that he sigh'd,
As though vex'd to be pleased. I remark'd that he sat
Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat
In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.
I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.
"Sir," he said, "if what vexes me here you would know,
Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours ago,
I walk'd into the Français, to look at Rachel.
(Sir, that woman in Phèdre is a miracle!) — Well,
I ask'd for a box: they were occupied all:
For a seat in the balcony: all taken! a stall:
Taken too: the whole house was as full as could be, —
Not a hole for a rat! I had just time to see
The lady I love *tête-à-tête* with a friend
In a box out of reach at the opposite end:
Then the crowd push'd me out. What was left me to do?
I tried for the tragedy . . . *que voulez-vous?*
Every place for the tragedy book'd! . . . *mon ami,*

The farce was close by: . . . at the farce *me voici!*
The piece is a new one: and Grassot plays well:
There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel:
And Hyacinth's nose is superb! . . . yet I meant
My evening elsewhere, and not thus, to have spent.
Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours!
Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers."

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment;
And I mark'd, when his features I fix'd in my comment,
O'er those features the same vague disquietude stray
I had seen on the face of my friend at the play;
And I thought that he too, very probably, spent
His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit!
Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert sand,
Grown impatient too soon for the long promised land
He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,
An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,
And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf
And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself
A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,
And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the knee.
The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods:
Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods
We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they bleed,
But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our need.
The land is athirst, and cries out! . . . 't is in vain;
The great blessing of Heaven descends not in rain.

XII.

It was night; and the lamps were beginning to gleam
Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his dream.

From that building which looks like a temple . . . and is
The Temple of — Health? Nay, but enter! I wis
That never the rosy-hued deity knew
One votary out of that sallow-cheek'd crew
Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,
Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians;
Jews — Hamburghers chiefly; — pure patriots, — Sugbians; —
"Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,
And the dwellers in Pontus" . . . My muse will not weary
More lines with the list of them . . . *cur fremuere?*
What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum?
Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come?
Oh, what is the name of the god at whose fane
Every nation is mix'd in so motley a train?
What weird Kabala lies on those tables outspread?
To what oracle turns with attention each head?
What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,
And what are those hierophants busied about?

XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro,
And rolls without ceasing the great Yes and No:
Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,
And the God worshipp'd here is the old God of Chance.
Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon
Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune;
And an indistinct music forever is roll'd,
That mixes and chimes with the chink of the gold,
From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,
Of figures forever eluding the gaze;
It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the glass,
And the weird words pursue it — *Rouge, Impair, et Passe!*
Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams as encumber
With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber
Of some witch when she seeks, through a nightmare, to grab at
The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met
Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet
Was but young) in this selfsame Pavilion of Chance.
The idler from England, the idler from France
Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial pleasure:
An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treasure,
And they both were too well-bred in aught to betray
One discourteous remembrance of things pass'd away.
'T was a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,
These friends exchange greetings; — the men who had been
Foes so nearly in days that were past.
This, no doubt,
Is why, on the night I am speaking about,
My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,
Without one suspicion his bosom to fret,
Although he had left, with his pleasant French friend,
Matilda, half vex'd, at the room's farthest end.

XV.

Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began
With a few modest thalers — away they all ran —
The reserve follow'd fast in the rear. As his purse
Grew lighter his spirits grew sensibly worse.
One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:
'T is an old law in physics — *Natura abhorret*
Vacuum — and my lord, as he watch'd his last crown
Tumble into the bank, turn'd away with a frown
Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have deck'd
On that day of all days when an empire was wreck'd
On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witness'd the last
Of his favorite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!
Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,
Within him the sudden strange sense that some eye
Had long been intently regarding him there, —
That some gaze was upon him too searching to bear

He rose and look'd up. Was it fact? Was it fable?
Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the green table,
That face, with its features so fatally known —
Those eyes, whose deep gaze answer'd strangely his own —
What was it? Some ghost from its grave come again?
Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?
Or was it herself — with those deep eyes of hers,
And that face unforgotten? — Lucile de Nevers!

XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,
Who appear'd to herself but the dream of a dream!
'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so hush'd,
That pale cheek forever by passion unflush'd,
There yawn'd an insatiate void, and there heaved
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.
The brief noon of beauty was passing away,
And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and gray,
O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.
And now, as all round her the dim evening stole,
With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved
For the want of that tender assurance received
From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an eye,
Which should say, or should look, "Fear thou naught, — I am by!"
And thus, through that lonely and self-fix'd existence,
Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and distance:
A strange sort of faint-footed fear, — like a mouse
That comes out, when 't is dark, in some old ducal house
Long deserted, where no one the creature can scare,
And the forms on the arras are all that move there.

In Rome, — in the Forum, — there open'd one night
A gulf. All the augurs turn'd pale at the sight.
In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.
Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said: —
"Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last

That which Rome hath most precious within it be cast.'
The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,
But the gulf yawn'd as wide. Rome seem'd likely enough
To be ruin'd ere this rent in her heart she could choke.
Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke:
"O Quirites! to this Heaven's question is come:
What to Rome is most precious? The manhood of Rome."
He plunged, and the gulf closed.
The tale is not new;
But the moral applies many ways, and is true.
How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be destroy'd?
'T is a warm human life that must fill up the void.
Thorough many a heart runs the rent in the fable;
But who to discover a Curtius is able?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding-place, at the source
Of the sunrise; where, fair in their fabulous course,
Run the rivers of Eden: an exile again,
To the cities of Europe — the scenes, and the men,
And the life, and the ways, she had left: still oppress'd
With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable breast.
The same, to the same things! The world, she had quitted
With a sigh, with a sigh she re-enter'd. Soon flitted
Through the salons and clubs, to the great satisfaction
Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.
The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once more
To her old friend, the World, had reopen'd her door;
The World came, and shook hands, and was pleased and amused
With what the World then went away and abused.
From the woman's fair fame it in naught could detract:
'T was the woman's free genius it vex'd and attack'd
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not reach
The lone heart they aim'd at. Her tears fell beyond
The world's limit, to feel that the world could respond
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in naught

'T was no longer this earth's idle inmates she sought:
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.
Some had genius; and all, wealth of mind to confer
On the world: but that wealth was not lavish'd for her.
For the genius of man, though so human indeed,
When call'd out to man's help by some great human need,
The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.
Genius touches the world at but one point alone
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known
To the world: all the infinite number of lines
That radiate thither a mere point combines,
But one only, — some central affection apart
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is Heart,
And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and mind.
And therefore it was that Lucile sigh'd to find
Men of genius appear, one and all in her ken,
When they stoop'd themselves to it, as mere clever men;
Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are unfurl'd
Worlds new-fashion'd for man, as mere men of the world.
And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight
Of the sunset of youth, with her face from the light,
And watch'd her own shadow grow long at her feet,
As though stretch'd out, the shade of some *other* to meet,
The woman felt homeless and childless: in scorn
She seem'd mock'd by the voices of children unborn;
And when from these sombre reflections away
She turn'd, with a sigh, to that gay world, more gay
For her presence within it, she knew herself friendless;
That her path led from peace, and that path appear'd endless;
That even her beauty had been but a snare,
And her wit sharpen'd only the edge of despair.

XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flush'd by surprise,
Alfred turn'd to Lucile. With those deep searching eyes

She look'd into his own. Not a word that she said,
Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betray'd.
She seem'd to smile through him, at something beyond:
When she answer'd his questions, she seem'd to respond
To some voice in herself. With no trouble descried,
To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied.
Not so he. At the sight of that face back again
To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,
A remember'd resentment, half check'd by a wild
And relentful regret like a motherless child
Softly seeking admittance, with plaintive appeal,
To the heart which resisted its entrance.
Lucile
And himself thus, however, with freedom allow'd
To old friends, talking still side by side, left the crowd
By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, however,
By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never
Seen her husband's new friend.
She had follow'd by chance,
Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance
Which the Duke, when he witness'd their meeting, had turn'd
On Lucile and Lord Alfred; and, scared, she discern'd
On his feature the shade of a gloom so profound
That she shudder'd instinctively. Deaf to the sound
Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers
He replied not, but murmur'd, "Lucile de Nevers
Once again then? so be it!" In the mind of that man,
At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the plan
Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone
(To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)
As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of thought
By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

XIX.

"So! he thought, "they meet thus: and reweave the old charm!
And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his arm,
And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not of me!

Oh, what if I show'd her that I, too, can be
Loved by one — her own rival — more fair and more young?"
The serpent rose in him: a serpent which, stung,
Sought to sting.
Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye
Fix'd upon them, Lucile and my lord saunter'd by,
In converse which seem'd to be earnest. A smile
Now and then seem'd to show where their thoughts touch'd
Meanwhile
The muse of this story, convinced that they need her,
To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

XX.

The Duke, with that sort of aggressive false praise
Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise
From a listener (as sometimes a judge, just before
He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er
The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly
With the man he is minded to hang by and by),
Had referr'd to Lucile, and then stopp'd to detect
In the face of Matilda the growing effect
Of the words he had dropp'd. There 's no weapon that slays
Its victim so surely (if well aim'd) as praise.
Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen: and now
Each was silent, preoccupied, thoughtful.
You know
There are moments when silence, prolong'd and unbroken,
More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.
It is when the heart has an instinct of what
In the heart of another is passing. And that
In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence came
To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame?
What weighed down her head?
All your eye could discover
Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover
That trouble the Duke's presence seem'd to renew.

She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.
The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell
Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.
She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush rose blossom
Which had fall'n from the nosegay she wore in her bosom.
"This poor flower," she said, "seems it not out of place
In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile grace?"
She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile
The Duke watch'd her caressing the leaves all the while,
And continued on his side the silence. He knew
This would force his companion their talk to renew
At the point that he wish'd; and Matilda divined
The significant pause with new trouble of mind.
She lifted one moment her head; but her look
Encounter'd the ardent regard of the Duke,
And dropp'd back on her floweret abash'd. Then, still seeking
The assurance she fancied she show'd him by speaking,
She conceived herself safe in adopting again
The theme she should most have avoided just then.

XXI.

"Duke," she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke, her cheek burn'd,
"You know, then, this . . . lady?"
"Too well!" he return'd.

MATILDA.

True; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.

LUVOIS.

With emotion?

MATILDA.

Yes, yes! you described her, I know,
As possess'd of a charm all unrivall'd.

LUVOIS.

Alas!
You mistook me completely! You, madam, surpass
This lady as moonlight does lamplight; as youth
Surpasses its best imitations; as truth
The fairest of falsehoods surpasses; as nature
Surpasses art's masterpiece; ay, as the creature
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-glasses!

"Yet you said," — she continued with some trepidation,
"That you quite comprehended" . . . a slight hesitation
Shook the sentence, . . . "a passion so strong as" . . .

LUVOIS.

True, true!
But not in a man that had once look'd at you.
Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or . . .
"Hush, hush!"
She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.
"Between man and woman these things differ so!
It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should I know?)
In you what it visits on us; or 't is true,
It may be, that we women are better than you."

LUVOIS.

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.
The world, in its judgment, some difference may make
'Twixt the man and the woman, so far as respects
Its social enactments; but not as affects
The one sentiment which, it were easy to prove,
Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

MATILDA.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe
Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear

I have learn'd that the heart cannot always repress
Or account for the feelings which sway it.
"Yes! yes!
That is too true, indeed!" . . . the Duke sigh'd.
And again
For one moment in silence continued the twain.

XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had needed
All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded:
"And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the gift
Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift
Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,
One pang of wrong'd love, to which women less fair
Are exposed, when they love?"
With a quick change of tone,
As though by resentment impell'd, he went on: —
"The name that you bear, it is whisper'd, you took
From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that look
So excited, so keen, on the face you must know
Throughout all its expressions, — that rapturous glow —
Those eloquent features — significant eyes —
Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no surprise,"
(He pointed his hand, as he spoke, to the door,
Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred) . . . "before,
Have you ever once seen what just now you may view
In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 't is new.
Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,
Are you loved?" . . .

XXIII.

He look'd at her — paused — felt if thus far
The ground held yet. The ardor with which he had spoken,
This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,
Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,

As though some indefinite danger were near.
With composure, however, at once she replied : —
"'T is three years since the day when I first was a bride,
And my husband I never had cause to suspect;
Nor ever have stoop'd, sir, such cause to detect.
Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see —
See, or fancy — some moment's oblivion of me,
I trust that I too should forget it, — for you
Must have seen that my heart is my husband's."
The hue
On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke
She had uttered this vague and half-frighten'd rebuke,
Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word
Seem'd to die on her lip, and could scarcely be heard.
There was silence again.
A great step had been made
By the Duke in the words he that evening had said.
There, half drown'd by the music, Matilda, that night,
Had listen'd, — long listen'd — no doubt, in despite
Of herself, to a voice she should never have heard,
And her heart by that voice had been troubled and stirr'd.
And so, having suffer'd in silence his eye
To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh :

XXIV.

"Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade
By disclosing my own ? The position," he said,
"In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse
The frankness and force of the words which I use.
You say that your heart is your husband's : You say
That you love him. You think so, of course, lady . . . nay.
Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.
But, trust me, no true love there can be without
Its dread penalty — jealousy.
"Well, do not start !
Until now, — either thanks to a singular art
Of supreme self-control, you have held them all down

Unreveal'd in your heart, — or you never have known
Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs
Which deep passion engenders; that anguish which hangs
On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.
But if, lady, the love you describe, in the bed
Of a blissful security thus hath reposed
Undisturb'd with mild eyelids on happiness closed,
Were it not to expose to a peril unjust,
And most cruel, that happy repose you so trust,
To meet, to receive, and, indeed, it may be,
For how long I know not, continue to see
A woman whose place rivals yours in the life
And the heart which not only your title of wife,
But also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,
Should have made wholly yours? — You, who gave all your own!
Reflect! — 't is the peace of existence you stake
On the turn of a die. And for whose — for his sake?
While you witness this woman, the false point of view
From which she must now be regarded by you
Will exaggerate to you, whatever they be,
The charms I admit she possesses. To me
They are trivial indeed; yet to your eyes, I fear
And foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.
Self-unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess
How more lovely by far is the grace you possess,
You will wrong your own beauty. The graces of art,
You will take for the natural charm of the heart;
Studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,
Will too soon in that fatal comparison be
To your fancy more fair than the sweet timid sense
Which, in shrinking, betrays its own best eloquence.
O then, lady, then, you will feel in your heart
The poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!
While you see her, yourself you no longer will see, —
You will hear her, and hear not yourself, — you will be
Unhappy; unhappy, because you will deem
Your own power less great than her power will seem.

And I shall not be by your side, day by day,
In despite of your noble displeasure, to say
'You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair
Than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can wear!'"

XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased
The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.
Still she spoke with what calmness she could —
"Sir, the while
I thank you," she said, with a faint scornful smile,
"For your fervor in painting my fancied distress:
Allow me the right some surprise to express
At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me
The possible depth of my own misery."
"That zeal would not startle you, madam," he said,
"Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,
The peculiar interest which causes that zeal —"

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.
"Duke," she answer'd in accents short, cold, and severe,
As she rose from her seat, "I continue to hear;
But permit me to say, I no more understand."

"Forgive!" with a nervous appeal of the hand,
And a well-feign'd confusion of voice and of look,
"Forgive, oh, forgive me!" at once cried the Duke.
"I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave
I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)
For one moment to speak of myself, — for I think
That you wrong me —"
His voice, as in pain seem'd to sink;
And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glisten'd.

XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listen'd.

XXVII.

"Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,
Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,"
He continued, "a sorrow which draws me to side
With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not," he cried,
"At so strange an avowal.
"I seek at a ball,
For instance, — the beauty admired by all?
No! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits
Scorn'd of course by the beauties, and shunn'd by the wit
All the world is accustom'd to wound, or neglect,
Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my respect.
No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,
I admit, to those charter'd redressers of wrong;
But I seek to console, where I can. 'T is a part
Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart."
These trite words, from the tone which he gave them, received
An appearance of truth, which might well be believed
By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda's.
And so
He continued . . . "O lady! alas, could you know
What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen!
How many a woman, believed to have been
Without a regret, I have known turn aside
To burst into heartbroken tears undescried!
On how many a lip have I witness'd the smile
Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart the while!"
Said Matilda, "Your life, it would seem, then, must be
One long act of devotion."
"Perhaps so," said he;
"But at least that devotion small merit can boast,
For one day may yet come, — if *one* day at the most, —
When, perceiving at last all the difference — how great! —
'Twixt the heart that neglects, and the heart that can wait,
'Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,
Some woman, that else might have pass'd in disdain

"Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife."

Or indifference by me, — in passing *that* day
Might pause with a word or a smile to repay
This devotion, — and then" . . .

XXVIII.

To Matilda's relief
At that moment her husband approach'd.
With some grief
I must own that her welcome, perchance, was express'd
The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast
Of a conscience disturb'd, and her smile not less warm,
Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his arm.
The Duke turn'd and adjusted his collar.
Thought he,
"Good! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee
That the family doctor 's the part I must play.
Very well! but the patients my visits shall pay."
Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife;
And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife
Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmur'd low
Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a bow
Which betoken'd a distant defiance, replied
To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried
Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace
Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her place
She assumed by Matilda, unconscious, perchance,
Or resolved not to notice, the half-frighten'd glance
That follow'd that movement.
The Duke to his feet
Arose; and, in silence, relinquish'd his seat.
One must own that the moment was awkward for all;
But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,
And from each the reserve seem'd, reluctant, to melt;
Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four
Thro' the crowd saunter'd, smiling.

XXIX.

Approaching the door,
Eugène de Luvois, who had fallen behind,
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was join'd
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal
Which appear'd to imply, without words, "Let us feel
That the friendship between us in years that are fled,
Has survived one mad moment forgotten," she said
"You remain, Duke, at Ems?"
He turn'd on her a look
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke;
And then, with a more than significant glance
At Matilda, maliciously answer'd, "Perchance
I have here an attraction. And you?" he return'd.
Lucile's eyes had follow'd his own, and discern'd
The boast they implied.
He repeated, "And you?"
And, still watching Matilda, she answer'd, "I too."
And he thought, as with that word she left him, she sigh'd.
The next moment her place she resumed by the side
Of Matilda; and soon they shook hands at the gate
Of the selfsame hotel.

XXX.

One depress'd, one elate,
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, thro' the glooms
Of the thick linden alley, return'd to the Rooms.
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,
At the inn, as they turn'd, arm-in-arm, from the door.
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, *experto*
(*Me miserum quoties!*) *crede Roberto.*
In silence, awhile, they walk'd onward.
At last
The Duke's thoughts to language half consciously pass'd.

LUVOIS.

Once more! yet once more!

ALFRED.

What?

LUVOIS.

We meet her, once more,
The woman for whom we two madmen of yore
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh!) were about to destroy
Each other!

ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I
Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say! can you
Recall it with coolness and quietude now?

LUVOIS.

Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true *Parisien:*
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then
The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I now may
Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until
Such a moment, I waited . . .

LUVOIS.

Oh! ask what you will.
Franc jeu! on the table my cards I spread out.
Ask!

ALFRED.

Duke, you were call'd to a meeting (no doubt
You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night
When you went; and before you return'd it was light.
We met: you accosted me then with a brow
Bright with triumph: your words (you remember them now?)
Were "Let us be friends!"

LUVOIS.

Well?

ALFRED.

How then, after that
Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

LUVOIS.

What!
Did she not then, herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of hers?

ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.
But the question I ask should be answer'd at last:
By you, if you will; if you will not, by her.

LUVOIS.

Indeed? but that question, milord, can it stir
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er?

ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, although love be no more.
Lucile ask'd me, this night, to my wife (understand
To *my wife!*) to present her. I did so. Her hand
Has clasp'd that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe
Respect to the name that is ours: and, if so,
To the woman that bears it a twofold respect.
Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile then reject
The proffer you made of your hand and your name?
Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim
Urged before? I ask bluntly this question, because
My title to do so is clear by the laws
That all gentlemen honor. Make only one sign
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,
From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance, and I
And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

The Duke
Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look
Of the man at his side, that he meant what he said,
And there flash'd in a moment these thoughts through his head.
"Leave Ems! would that suit me? no! that were again
To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,
She herself will . . . *et puis, il a raison; on est*
Gentilhomme avant tout!" He replied therefore,
"Nay!
Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,
In those days, I was mad; and in some mad reply
I threatened the life of the rival to whom
That rejection was due, I was led to presume.
She fear'd for his life; and the letter which then
She wrote me, I show'd you; we met: and again
My hand was refused, and my love was denied,
And the glance you mistook was the vizard which Pride
Lends to Humiliation.
"And so," half in jest,
He went on, "in this best world, 't is all for the best;
You are wedded (bless'd Englishman!), wedded to one
Whose past can be call'd into question by none:
And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still laugh to feel
I am lord of myself, and the Mode: and Lucile
Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair
As yon German moon o'er the linden-tops there!
A Dian in marble that scorns any troth
With the little love-gods, whom I thank for us both,
While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,
That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.
Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!"

XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,
Turn'd and enter'd the Rooms which, thus talking, meanwhile,
They had reach'd.

XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown
Heart and mind!) in the darkness bewilder'd, alone:
"And so," to himself did he mutter, "and so
'T was to rescue my life, gentle spirit! and, oh,
For this did I doubt her? . . . a light word — a look —
The mistake of a moment! . . . for this I forsook —
For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile! O Lucile!"
Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,
Weary changes on one dirge-like note through his brain,
As he stray'd down the darkness.

XXXIV.

Re-entering again
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turn'd to roulette,
And sat down, and play'd fast, and lost largely, and yet
He still smiled: night deepen'd: he play'd his last number
Went home: and soon slept: and still smil'd in his slumber

XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,
"In the grief or mischance of a friend you may note,
There is something which always gives pleasure."
Alas!
That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.
La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down —
"No misfortune, but what some one turns to his own
Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it
There ever is somebody ready to profit:
No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all
Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall
Of another man's heart, and make traffic in it."
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!

Fool! one man's wit
All men's selfishness how should it fathom?
O sage,
Dost thou satirize Nature?
She laughs at thy page.

CANTO II.

I.

COUSIN JOHN TO COUSIN ALFRED.

"London, 18—.

"My dear Alfred,
Your last letters put me in pain.
This contempt of existence, this listless disdain
Of your own life,— its joys and its duties,— the deuce
Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse!
I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your leg,
And compel you to stump through the world on a peg.
I wish that you had, like myself (more 's the pity!),
To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.
I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread
Of another — (what is it that Dante has said?)
And the trouble of other men's stairs. In a word,
I wish fate had some real affliction conferr'd
On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had cause
For neglecting life's duties, and damning its laws!
This pressure against all the purpose of life,
This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,
Betoken'd, I grant that it may be in truth,
The richness and strength of the new wine of youth.
But if, when the wine should have mellow'd with time,
Being bottled and binn'd, to a flavor sublime
It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,
Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste

The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,
Self-love's little lapdog, the overfed darling
Of a hypochondriacal fancy appears,
To my thinking, at least, in a man of your years,
At the midnoon of manhood with plenty to do,
And every incentive for doing it too, —
With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing
For prayer, and of joys more than most men for blessing;
With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full purse,—
Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse!
I wish I could get you at least to agree
To take life as it is, and consider with me,
If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers;
It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.
Do you think none have known but yourself all the pain
Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain?
And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,
'Twixt the life that 's within, and the life that 's without?
What one of us finds the world just as he likes?
Or gets what he wants when he wants it? Or strikes
Without missing the thing that he strikes at the first?
Or walks without stumbling? Or quenches his thirst
At one draught? Bah! I tell you! I, bachelor John,
Have had griefs of my own. But what then? I push on
All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain
Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.
God means every man to be happy, be sure.
He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.
Our duty down here is to do, not to know.
Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so.
Let each moment, like Time's last ambassador, come:
It will wait to deliver its message; and some
Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed
A man does, but the way that he does it, should plead
For the man's compensation in doing it.
"Here,
My next neighbor 's a man with twelve thousand a year,
Who deems that life has not a pastime more pleasant

Than to follow a fox, or to slaughter a pheasant.
Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,
Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,
All the day through upon a committee, and late
To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,
As though he were getting each speaker by heart,
Though amongst them he never presumes to take part.
One asks himself why, without murmur or question,
He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,
For a labor of which the result seems so small.
'The man is ambitious,' you say. Not at all.
He has just sense enough to be fully aware
That he never can hope to be Premier, or share
The renown of a Tully; — or even to hold
A subordinate office. He is not so bold
As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear
With patience his modest opinions to hear.
'But he wants something!'
"What! with twelve thousand a year?
What could Government give him would be half so dear
To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun
Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital run?
'No; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain;
The man would be more than his neighbors, 't is plain;
And the drudgery drearily gone through in town
Is more than repaid by provincial renown.
Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,
Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance; the goose,
If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,
As proud as a sultan, returns to his boors.'
Wrong again! if you think so,
"For, *primo;* my friend
Is the head of a family known from one end
Of his shire to the other, as the oldest; and therefore
He despises fine lords and fine ladies. *He* care for
A peerage? no truly! *Secondo;* he rarely
Or never goes out: dines at Bellamy's sparely,
And abhors what you call the gay world.

"Then, I ask,
What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed task
As the life of this man, — but the sense of its duty?
And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest beauty
Have never inspired in my soul that intense,
Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense
Of heart-felt admiration I feel for this man,
As I see him beside me; — there, wearing the wan
London daylight away, on his humdrum committee;
So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,
And wonder — and worship, I might say.

"To me
There seems something nobler than genius to be
In that dull patient labor no genius relieves,
That absence of all joy which yet never grieves;
The humility of it! the grandeur withal!
The sublimity of it! And yet, should you call
The man's own very slow apprehension to this,
He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is!
His work is the duty to which he was born;
He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn:
And this man is no uncommon type (I thank Heaven!)
Of this land's common men. In all other lands, even
The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 't is the reason
That Government oscillates ever 'twixt treason
And tyranny elsewhere.

"I wander away
Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.
You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the soul
Is immortal; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,
Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart
Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art: —
The Greek Psyche, — that 's beauty, — the perfect ideal
But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,
With its pain'd aspiration and strife. In those pale
Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.
You have studied all this. Then, the universe, too,
Is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.

Geology opens the mind. So you know
Something also of strata and fossils; these show
The bases of cosmical structure: some mention
Of the nebulous theory demands your attention;
And so on.

"In short, it is clear the interior
Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior
In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,
To that of my poor parliamentary squire;
But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this heat
Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incomplete.
You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly at?
My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.
An old illustration 's as good as a new,
Provided the old illustration be true.
We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we fly,
Though we marvel to see them ascending so high;
Things slight in themselves, — long-tail'd toys, and no more.
What is it that makes the kite steadily soar
Through the realms where the cloud and the whirlwind have birth
But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth?
I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,
And the hornbook I learn'd on my poor mother's knee.
In truth, I suspect little else do we learn
From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we turn,
Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,
What we learn'd in the hornbook of childhood.

"Your case
Is exactly in point.

"Fly your kite, if you please,
Out of sight: let it go where it will, on the breeze;
But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,
Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.
No man is the absolute lord of his life.
You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and dear wife
If I often have sigh'd by my own silent fire,
With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire

For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,
Some dull winter evening to solace and share
With the love which the world its good children allows
To shake hands with, — in short, a legitimate spouse,
This thought has consoled me: 'at least I have given
For my own good behavior no hostage to heaven.'
You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,
I would rather break stones on a road than be you.
If any man wilfully injured, or led
That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,
Even though you yourself were the sinner!

"And this
Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)
To the matter I meant to have mention'd at once,
But these thoughts put it out of my head for the nonce.
Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,
Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,
The wolf best received by the flock he devours
Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.
At least, this has long been my settled conviction,
And I almost would venture at once the prediction
That before very long — but no matter! I trust
For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.
But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on
The score of such men as, with both God and Mammon,
Seem so shrewdly familiar.

"Neglect not this warning.
There were rumors afloat in the City this morning
Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows? would he fleece
At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?
For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune
Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune
Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,
Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up winner,
I say, lose no time! get it out of the grab
Of her trustee and uncle, Sir Ridley MacNab.
I trust those deposits, at least, are drawn out,

And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.
A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.
Verbum sap. I admit nothing yet justifies
My mistrust; but I have in my own mind a notion
That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of devotion,
Have long been the only ostensible capital
On which he does business. If so, time must sap it all,
Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,
Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.
I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect;
I give you my notions. Form yours and reflect.
My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.
I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell
Worth your hearing. We think that the Government here
Will not last our next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,
You will see by the Times. There are symptoms which show
That the ministers now are preparing to go,
And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes.
It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,
And cramming their pockets with bonbons. Your news
Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,
Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so,
You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman? I know
That the man is a sad *mauvais sujet.* Take care
Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there;
But, before I am free, you are sure to be gone.
Good-by, my dear fellow. Yours, anxiously,

JOHN."

II.

This is just the advice I myself would have given
To Lord Alfred, had I been his cousin, which, Heaven
Be praised, I am not. But it reach'd him indeed
In an unlucky hour, and received little heed.
A half-languid glance was the most that he lent at
That time to these homilies. *Primum dementat*
Quem Deus vult perdere. Alfred in fact

Was behaving just then in a way to distract
Job's self had Job known him. The more you 'd have thought
The Duke's court to Matilda his eye would have caught,
The more did his aspect grow listless to hers,
And the more did it beam to Lucile de Nevers.
And Matilda, the less she found love in the look
Of her husband, the less did she shrink from the Duke.
With each day that pass'd o'er them, they each, heart from heart,
Woke to feel themselves further and further apart.
More and more of his time Alfred pass'd at the table;
Played high; and lost more than to lose he was able.
He grew feverish, querulous, absent, perverse, —
And here I must mention, what made matters worse,
That Lucile and the Duke at the selfsame hotel
With the Vargraves resided. It needs not to tell
That they all saw too much of each other. The weather
Was so fine that it brought them each day all together
In the garden, to listen, of course, to the band.
The house was a sort of phalanstery; and
Lucile and Matilda were pleased to discover
A mutual passion for music. Moreover
The Duke was an excellent tenor: could sing
"*Ange si pure*" in a way to bring down on the wing
All the angels St. Cicely play'd to. My lord
Would also at times, when he was not too bored,
Play Beethoven, and Wagner's new music, not ill;
With some little things of his own, showing skill.
For which reason, as well as for some others too,
Their rooms were a pleasant enough rendezvous.
Did Lucile, then, encourage (the heartless coquette!)
All the mischief she could not but mark?

Patience yet!

III.

In that garden, an arbor, withdrawn from the sun,
By laburnum and lilac with blooms overrun,
Form'd a vault of cool verdure, which made, when the heat

"She drooped down her head."

Of the noontide hung heavy, a gracious retreat.
And here, with some friends of their own little world,
In the warm afternoons, till the shadows uncurl'd
From the feet of the lindens, and crept through the grass,
Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.
The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,
Undeterr'd by tobacco, their work there, and sing
Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the bee
Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there was tea
(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,
Fruit, and coffee. Ὦ Ἔσπερε, πάντα φέρεις!
Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided
O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,
With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a thick head,
And an old Russian Countess both witty and wicked,
And two Austrian Colonels, — that Alfred, who yet
Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,
Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow
'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and fro,
And joining her, cried, "Thank the good stars, we meet!
I have so much to say to you!"
"Yes? . . ." with her sweet
Serene voice, she replied to him . . "Yes? and I too
Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you."
She was paler just then than her wont was. The sound
Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.
"You are ill?" he exclaim'd.
"No!" she hurriedly said,
"No, no!"
"You alarm me!"
She droop'd down her head
"If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to divine
The purpose of what has been passing in mine,
My farewell can scarcely alarm you."

ALFRED.

Lucile!
Your farewell! you go!

LUCILE.

Yes, Lord Alfred

ALFRED.

Reveal
The cause of this sudden unkindness.

LUCILE.

Unkind?

ALFRED.

Yes! what else is this parting?

LUCILE.

No, no! are you blind?
Look into your own heart and home. Can you see
No reason for this, save unkindness in me?
Look into the eyes of your wife — those true eyes
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise
The sweet soul shining through them.

ALFRED.

Lucile! (first and last
Be the word, if you will!) let me speak of the past.
I know now, alas! though I know it too late,
What pass'd at that meeting which settled my fate.
Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet! let it be!
I but say what is due to yourself — due to me,
And must say it.
He rush'd incoherently on,
Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,
To explain how, and whence, he had wrong'd her before,
All the complicate coil wound about him of yore,
All the hopes that had flown with the faith that was fled
"And then, O Lucile, what was left me," he said,
"When my life was defrauded of you, but to take
That life, as 't was left, and endeavor to make

Unobserved by another, the void which remain'd
Unconceal'd to myself? If I have not attain'd,
I have striven. One word of unkindness has never
Pass'd my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has ever
Received my submission. And if, of a truth,
I have fail'd to renew what I felt in my youth,
I at least have been loyal to what I *do* feel,
Respect, duty, honor, affection. Lucile,
I speak not of love now, nor love's long regret:
I would not offend you, nor dare I forget
The ties that are round me But may there not be
A friendship yet hallow'd between you and me?
May we not be yet friends — friends the dearest?"

"Alas!"

She replied, "for one moment, perchance, did it pass
Through my own heart, that dream which forever hath brought
To those who indulge it in innocent thought
So fatal and evil a waking! But no.
For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree would grow
On the borders of Hades: beyond it, what lies?
The wheel of Ixion, alas! and the cries
Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,
Are the days when with innocence we could discuss
Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams of *my* life!
Oh trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.
And I — in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow
To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow
Not one blush when I first took her hand. With no blush
Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.

"Hush! hush!

I would say what I wish'd to have said when you came.
Do not think that years leave us and find us the same!
The woman you knew long ago, long ago,
Is no more. You yourself have within you, I know,
The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,
Whereby the past years will bear fruit. As for me,
I go my own way, — onward, upward!

"O yet,

Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret,
When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled, —
The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,
But it is not corrupted. I too have at last
Lived to learn that love is not — (such love as is past,
Such love as youth dreams of at least) — the sole part
Of life, which is able to fill up the heart;
Even that of a woman.
"Between you and me
Heaven fixes a gulf, over which you must see
That our guardian angels can bear us no more.
We each of us stand on an opposite shore.
Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,
By an instinct men never attain, to discern
Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair,
Matilda is young — see her now, sitting there! —
How tenderly fashion'd — (oh, is she not? say,)
To love and be loved!"

IV.

He turn'd sharply away —
"Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair;
Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware;
But Matilda 's a statue, Matilda 's a child;
Matilda loves not —"
Lucile quietly smiled
As she answer'd him: — "Yesterday, all that you say
Might be true; it is false, wholly false, though, to-day."
"How? — what mean you?"
"I mean that to-day," she replied,
"The statue with life has become vivified:
I mean that the child to a woman has grown:
And that woman is jealous."
"What! she?" with a tone
Of ironical wonder, he answer'd — "what, she!
She jealous! — Matilda! — of whom, pray? — not me!"

"My lord, you deceive yourself; no one but you
Is she jealous of. Trust me. And thank Heaven, too,
That so lately this passion within her hath grown.
For who shall declare, if for months she had known
What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,
That knowledge perchance might have cost you more dear?"

"Explain! explain, madam!" he cried in surprise;
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.

"How blind are you men!" she replied. "Can you doubt
That a woman, young, fair, and neglected —"
"Speak out!"
He gasp'd with emotion. "Lucile! you mean — what?
Do you doubt her fidelity?"
"Certainly not.
Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain
Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain
From touching a subject so fragile. However,
Bear with me awhile, if I frankly endeavor
To invade for one moment your innermost life.
Your honor, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,
Are dear to me, — most dear! And I am convinced
That you rashly are risking that honor."
He winced,
And turn'd pale, as she spoke.
She had aim'd at his heart,
And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,
That her aim had not miss'd.
"Stay, Lucile!" he exclaim'd,
"What in truth do you mean by these words, vaguely framed
To alarm me? Matilda? — my wife? — do you know?" —

"I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.
But I know not how far your continued neglect
Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.
Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere
Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet clear,

Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece
Which surrounded and hid the celestials in Greece
From the glances of men, would disperse and depart
At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart, —
For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,
A disease heal'd too oft by a criminal cure;
And the heart left too long to its ravage in time
May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime."

V.

"Such thoughts could have never," he falter'd, "I know,
Reach'd the heart of Matilda."
"Matilda? oh no!
But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of themselves
To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves
That seek lonely places, — there rarely is wanting
Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting
To conjure them to her."
"O lady, beware!
At this moment, around me I search everywhere
For a clew to your words" —
"You mistake them," she said,
Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.
"I was putting a mere hypothetical case."

With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.
"Woe to him, . . ." he exclaim'd . . . "woe to him that shall feel
Such a hope! for I swear, if he did but reveal
One glimpse, — it should be the last hope of his life!"
The clench'd hand and bent eyebrow betoken'd the strife
She had roused in his heart.
"You forget," she began,
'That you menace yourself. You yourself are the man
That is guilty. Alas! must it ever be so?
Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,
And fight our own shadows forever? O think!

The trial from which you, the stronger ones, shrink,
You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure;
You bid her be true to the laws you abjure;
To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,
With the force that has fail'd you; and that too, when under
The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,
The immunity claim'd for yourselves you abuse:
Where the contract exists, it involves obligation
To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.
You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,
A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free.
Then, O Alfred! be juster at heart: and thank Heaven
That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given
That you have not wherewith to reproach her, albeit
You have cause to reproach your own self, could you see it!"

VI.

In the silence that follow'd the last word she said,
In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,
Poor Lucile mark'd her words had sufficed to impart
A new germ of motion and life to that heart
Of which he himself had so recently spoken
As dead to emotion — exhausted, or broken!
New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.
In the husband indifferent no more to the wife
She already, as she had foreseen, could discover
That Matilda had gain'd, at her hands, a new lover.
So after some moments of silence, whose spell
They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

VII.

"Well?"

VIII.

"Lucile," he replied, as that soft quiet hand
In his own he clasp'd warmly, "I both understand
And obey you."

"Thank Heaven!" she murmur'd.
"O yet,
One word, I beseech you! I cannot forget,"
He exclaim'd, "we are parting for life. You have shown
My pathway to me: but say, what is your own?"
The calmness with which until then she had spoken
In a moment seem'd strangely and suddenly broken.
She turn'd from him nervously, hurriedly.
"Nay,
I know not," she murmur'd, "I follow the way
Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.
I know only that far, far away it must tend
From all places in which we have met, or might meet.
Far away! — onward — upward!"
A smile strange and sweet
As the incense that rises from some sacred cup
And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up
Her whole face, with those words.
"Wheresoever it be,
May all gentlest angels attend you!" sigh'd he,
"And bear my heart's blessing wherever you are!"
And her hand, with emotion, he kiss'd.

IX.

From afar
That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld
With far other emotions: her young bosom swell'd,
And her young cheek with anger was crimson'd.
The Duke
Adroitly attracted towards it her look
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-construed,
Renown'd Bishop Berkley has fully, for one, strew'd
With arguments page upon page to teach folks
That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.

But it surely is hard, since we can't do without them,
That our senses should make us so oft wish to doubt them!

CANTO III.

I.

When first the red savage call'd Man strode, a king,
Through the wilds of creation — the very first thing
That his naked intelligence taught him to feel
Was the shame of himself; and the wish to conceal
Was the first step in art. From the apron which Eve
In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,
To the furbelow'd flounce and the broad crinoline
Of my lady . . . you all know of course whom I mean . .
This art of concealment has greatly increas'd.
A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast;
And that drama of passions as old as the hills,
Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,
Is only reveal'd now and then to our eyes
In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled,
'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough trembled,
And the deep-bosom'd lilac, emparadising
The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and sing,
The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen only,
A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom;
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,
Like those who, when Florence was yet in her glories,
Cheated death and kill'd time with Boccaccian stories.

But at length the long twilight more deeply grew shaded,
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded,
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,
Through the shadowy garden were slumbering now.
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,
They all seem'd to be saying . . . "Once more we're alone.
And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are gone!"

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, look'd down
O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was their own,
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,
And enter'd the garden, unseen, unattended.
Her forehead was aching and parch'd, and her breast
By a vague inexpressible sadness oppress'd:
A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed, that just now
The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled
Half-stifled, seem'd ready to sink on her head) . . .
Out into the night air, the silence, the bright
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!
Her husband that day had look'd once in her face,
And press'd both her hands in a silent embrace,
And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.
He, of late so indifferent and listless! . . . at last
Was he startled and awed by the change which had pass'd
O'er the once radiant face of his young wife? Whence came
That long look of solicitous fondness? . . . the same
Look and language of quiet affection — the look
And the language, alas! which so often she took
For pure love in the simple repose of its purity —

Her own heart thus lull'd to a fatal security!
Has would he deceive her again by this kindness?
Had she been, then, O fool! in her innocent blindness
The sport of transparent illusion? ah folly!
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,
She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,
For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove
But a friendship profanely familiar?
"And love? . . .
What was love, then? . . . not calm, not secure — scarcely kind
But in one, all intensest emotions combined:
Life and death: pain and rapture."
Thus wandering astray,
Led by doubt, through the darkness she wander'd away.
All silently crossing, recrossing the night,
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burn'd,
And into the infinite ever return'd.
And silently o'er the obscure and unknown
In the heart of Matilda there darted and shone
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to expire,
Leaving traces behind them of tremulous fire.

IV.

She enter'd that arbor of lilacs, in which
The dark air with odors hung heavy and rich,
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.
'Twas the place
In which she so lately had sat, face to face
With her husband,— and her, the pale stranger detested,
Whose presence her heart like a plague had infested.
The whole spot with evil remembrance was haunted.
Through the darkness there rose on the heart which it daunted
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away

The acacias were muttering, like mischievous elves,
The whole story over again to themselves,
Each word,— and each word was a wound! By degrees
Her memory mingled its voice with the trees.

v.

Like the whisper Eve heard, when she paused by the root
Of the sad tree of knowledge, and gazed on its fruit,
To the heart of Matilda the trees seem'd to hiss
Wild instructions, revealing man's last right, which is
The right of reprisals.
An image uncertain,
And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went;
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent:
It pass'd and repass'd her; it went and it came
Forever returning; forever the same;
And forever more clearly defined; till her eyes
In that outline obscure could at last recognize
The man to whose image, the more and the more
That her heart, now aroused from its calm sleep of yore,
From her husband detach'd itself slowly, with pain,
Her thoughts had return'd, and return'd to, again,
As though by some secret indefinite law, —
The vigilant Frenchman — Eugène de Luvois!

VI.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some
Night-witchcraft her vision a fact had become.
On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,
That a man was approaching behind her. She knew
By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,
And the quick-beating heart, that this man was Eugène.
Her first instinct was flight; but she felt her slight foot
As heavy as though to the soil it had root.
And the Duke's voice retain'd her, like fear in a dream.

VII.

"Ah, lady! in life there are meetings which seem
Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too?
Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you?
Alone with my thoughts, on this starlighted lawn,
By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn
To revisit the memories left in the place
Where so lately this evening I look'd in your face.
And I find, — you, yourself — my own dream!
"Can there be
In this world one thought common to you and to me?
If so, . . . I, who deem'd but a moment ago
My heart uncompanion'd, save only by woe,
Should indeed be more bless'd than I dare to believe —
— Ah, but *one* word, but one from your lips to receive" . . .

Interrupting him quickly, she murmur'd, "I sought,
Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,
Which I needed." . . .
"Lives solitude only for one?
Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?
Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for this? —
The same thought in both hearts, — be it sorrow or bliss;
If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady — you,
Are you not yet alone, — even though we be two?"

"For that," . . . said Matilda, . . . "needs were, you should
read
What I have in my heart" . . .
"Think you, lady, indeed,
You are yet of that age when a woman conceals
In her heart so completely whatever she feels
From the heart of the man whom it interests to know
And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not so,
Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,
But I read in your heart as I read in a book."

"Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless
It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,
And some sadness?"
"No doubt. To all facts there are laws
The effect has its cause, and I mount to the cause."

VIII.

Matilda shrank back; for she suddenly found
That a finger was press'd on the yet bleeding wound
She, herself, had but that day perceived in her breast.

"You are sad," . . . said the Duke (and that finger yet press'd
With a cruel persistence the wound it made bleed) —
You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need
Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be
Beloved, and to love. You are sad: for you see
That you are not beloved, as you deem'd that you were:
You are sad: for that knowledge hath left you aware
That you have not yet loved, though you thought that you had
Yes, yes! . . . you are sad — because knowledge is sad!"

He could not have read more profoundly her heart.
"What gave you," she cried, with a terrified start,
"Such strange power?" . . .
"To read in your thoughts?" he exclaim'd,
"O lady, — a love, deep, profound — be it blamed
Or rejected, — a love, true, intense — such, at least,
As you, and you only, could wake in my breast!"

"Hush, hush! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity!" she gasp'd
Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had clasp'd
In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

"For pity?" . . . he echoed, "for pity! and what
Is the pity you owe him? his pity for you!
He, the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew!
The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,

And matchless! (whose happiness did he not swear
To cherish through life?) he neglects her — for whom?
For a fairer than she? No! the rose in the bloom
Of that beauty which, even when hidd'n, can prevail
To keep sleepless with song the aroused nightingale,
Is not fairer; for even in the pure world of flowers
Her symbol is not, and this poor world of ours
Has no second Matilda! For whom? Let that pass!
'T is not I, 't is not you, that can name her, alas!
And *I* dare not question or judge her. But why,
Why cherish the cause of your own misery?
Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you?
Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks through?
And why, since you have but to stretch forth your hand,
The love which you need and deserve to command,
Why shrink? Why repel it?"

"O hush, sir! O hush!"
Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one blush.
"Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life!
Is not Alfred your friend? and am I not his wife?"

IX.

"And have I not, lady," he answer'd, . . . "respected
His rights as a friend, till himself he neglected
Your rights as a wife? Do you think 't is alone
For three days I have loved you? My love may have grown
I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,
In watching their tears, and in sounding your sighs.
But, O lady! I loved you before I believed
That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever grieved.
Then I deem'd you were happy — I deem'd you possess'd
All the love you deserved, — and I hid in my breast
My own love, till this hour — when I could not but feel
Your grief gave me the right my own grief to reveal!
I knew, years ago, of the singular power
Which Lucile o'er your husband possess'd. Till the hour
In which he reveal'd it himself, did I, — say! —

By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?
No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken
Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had broken
Which bound *your* heart to him. And now — now, that his love
For another hath left your own heart free to rove,
What is it, — even now, — that I kneel to implore you?
Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you
Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend
On me not one thought, save to think me your friend.
Let me speak to you, — ah, let me speak to you still!
Hush to silence my words in your heart, if you will.
I ask no response: I ask only your leave
To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you grieve!"

X.

"Leave me, leave me!" . . . she gasp'd, with a voice thick and low
From emotion. "For pity's sake, Duke, let me go!
I feel that to blame we should both of us be,
Did I linger."
"To blame? yes, no doubt!" . . . answer'd he,
"If the love of your husband, in bringing you peace,
Had forbidden you hope. But he signs your release
By the hand of another. One moment! but one!
Who knows when, alas! I may see you alone
As to-night I have seen you? or when we may meet
As to-night we have met? when, entranced at your feet,
As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow
The thoughts which are pining for utterance now?"
"Duke! Duke!" . . . she exclaim'd . . . "for heaven's sake let me go!
It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.
We must not be seen here together. The night
Is advancing. I feel overwhelm'd with affright!
It is time to return to my lord."
"To your lord?"

He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word,
"To your lord? do you think he awaits you, in truth?
Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth?
Return to your lord! . . . his restraint to renew?
And hinder the glances which are not for you?
No, no! . . . at this moment his looks seek the face
Of another! another is there in your place!
Another consoles him! another receives
The soft speech which from silence your absence relieves!"

XI.

"You mistake, sir!" . . . responded a voice, calm, severe,
And sad, . . . "You mistake, sir! that other is here."

Eugène and Matilda both started.
"Lucile!"
With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.
"Ho, oh!
What! eaves-dropping, madam?" . . the Duke cried . . "And so
You were listening?"
"Say, rather," she said, "that I heard,
Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word, —
Heard — and therefore reply."
"Belle Comtesse," said the Duke,
With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,
Which betray'd that he felt himself baffled . . . you know
That your place is not *here*."
"Duke," she answer'd him slow
"My place is wherever my duty is clear;
And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.
O lady, this morning my place was beside
Your husband, because (as she said this she sigh'd)
I felt that from folly fast growing to crime —
The crime of self-blindness — Heaven yet spared me time

To save for the love of an innocent wife
All that such love deserved in the heart and the life
Of the man to whose heart and whose life you alone
Can with safety confide the pure trust of your own."

She turn'd to Matilda, and lightly laid on her
Her soft quiet hand . . .
"'T is, O lady, the honor
Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite
Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-night —
Save for both of you, lady! for yours I revere;
Duc de Luvois, what say you? — my place is not here?"

XII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted, and sought
Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.
The Duke stood confounded, and follow'd them not.
But not yet the house had they reach'd when Lucile
Her tender and delicate burden could feel
Sink and falter beside her. Oh, then she knelt down,
Flung her arms round Matilda, and press'd to her own
The poor bosom beating against her.
The moon,
Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of June,
Floated up from the hillside, sloped over the vale,
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one pale,
Minute, scintillescent, and tremulous star
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,
Thus to each of those women revealing the face
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.
With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not but feel
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night,
And it touch'd her pure brow to a heavenly light.

"In the name of your husband, dear lady," she said;
"In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift your head,
For those blushes are noble. Alas! do not trust
To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,
That the fault of the husband can cancel the wife's.
Take heart! and take refuge and strength in your life's
Pure silence, — there, kneel, pray, and hope, weep, and wait!"
"Saved, Lucile!" sobb'd Matilda, "but saved to what fate?
Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes."
"Hush!" the sweet voice replied,
"Fool'd away by a fancy, again to your side
Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And return
For the love you can give, with the love that you yearn
To receive, lady. What was it chill'd you both now?
Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how
Love is nourish'd by love. Well! henceforth you will prove
Your heart worthy of love, — since it knows how to love."

XIII.

"What gives you such power over me, that I feel
Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?"
Sigh'd Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face
Of Lucile.
There pass'd suddenly through it the trace
Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair forehead came down
A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.
"The pupil of sorrow, perchance" . . . she replied.
"Of sorrow?" Matilda exclaim'd . . . "O confide
To my heart your affliction. In all you made known
I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my own!"

"And I some consolation, no doubt; for the tears
Of another have not flow'd for me many years."

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her; and
Thus together they enter'd the house.

XIV.

'T was the room
Of Matilda.
The languid and delicate gloom
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.
The casement oped into the garden. The pale
Cool moonlight stream'd through it. One lone nightingale
Sung aloof in the laurels.
And here, side by side,
Hand in hand, the two women sat down undescried,
Save by guardian angels.
As, when, sparkling yet
From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels, leaves wet
The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines
As one flower with two faces, in hush'd, tearful speech,
Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each
Link'd, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,
So united, yet diverse, the two women there
Look'd, indeed, like two flowers upon one drooping stem,
In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.
All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who knows?
All that heart gain'd from heart?
Leave the lily, the rose
Undisturb'd with their secret within them. For who
To the heart of the flowret can follow the dew?
A night full of stars! O'er the silence, unseen,
The footsteps of sentinel angels, between
The dark land and deep sky were moving. You heard
Pass'd from earth up to heaven the happy watchword
Which brighten'd the stars as amongst them it fell
From earth's heart, which it eased . . . "All is well! all is well!"

CANTO IV.

I.

The Poets pour wine; and, when 't is new, all decry it
But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.
And Polonius, who praises no wine that 's not Massic,
Complains of my verse, that my verse is not classic.
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,
My earlier verses, sighs "Commonplace sadly!"

As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly,
But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly
In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,
That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.
Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard
Better far than Longinus himself can reward
The appeal to her feelings of which she approves;
And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at his head
And a brass on his breast, — when a man is once dead?
Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon were then
Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models for men.
The reformer's? — a creed by posterity learnt
A century after its author is burnt!
The poet's? — a laurel that hides the bald brow
It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask Raphael now
Which Madonna 's authentic! The statesman's? — a name
For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!
The soldier's? — three lines on the cold Abbey pavement!
Were this all the life of the wise and the brave meant,
All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it were
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,
Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade
And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead,
Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long thought.

A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for nought
Save the name of John Milton! For all men, indeed,
Who in some choice edition may graciously read,
With fair illustration, and erudite note,
The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,
Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this —
The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss
The grief of the man: Tasso's song — not his madness!
Dante's dreams — not his waking to exile and sadness!
Milton's music — but not Milton's blindness! . . .
Yet rise,
My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!
Say — the life, in the living it, savors of worth:
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:
That the fact has a value apart from the fame:
That a deeper delight, in the mere labor, pays
Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:
And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writings were lost,
And his genius, though never a trace of it crossed
Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt
All that Hamlet hath utter'd, and haply where, pure
On its death-bed, wrong'd Love lay, have moan'd with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon return'd
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly burn'd
As though half out of humor to find itself there
Forced to light for no purpose a room that was bare.
He sat down by the window alone. Never yet
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new moon!
The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on the stream
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the dream

Of a lover; and all things were glad and at rest
Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.
He endeavor'd to think — an unwonted employment,
Which appear'd to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

"Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,
Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,"
Wrote the tutor of Nero; who wrote, be it said,
Better far than he acted — but peace to the dead!
He bled for his pupil: what more could he do?
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour
He sat with his head droop'd like some stubborn flower
Beaten down by the rush of the rain — with such force
Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course
Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,
From the cloud that had darken'd the evening for him.
At one moment he rose — rose and open'd the door,
And wistfully look'd down the dark corridor
Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with a sigh
Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly
Back again to his place in a sort of submission
To doubt, and return'd to his former position —
That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the face,
And the eye vaguely fix'd on impalpable space.
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,
As once Circe the winds, had seal'd thought; and his wife
And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses
Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had been
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,
Which was making some noise in the passage without.
A sound English voice, with a round English accent,
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back sent;
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver;
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot
Which reveal'd by its sound no diminutive foot:
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or
Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major
On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow
With a warmth for which only starvation and snow
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.
Then the two men sat down and scann'd each other's faces;
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had shaken
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried,
At a glance, something wrong.

V.

"What's the matter?" he cried.
"What have you to tell me?"

JOHN.

What! have you not heard?

ALFRED.

Heard what?

JOHN.

This sad business —

ALFRED.

I? no, not a word.

JOHN.

You received my last letter?

ALFRED.

I think so. If not,
What then?

JOHN.

You have acted upon it?

ALFRED.

On what?

JOHN.

The advice that I gave you —

ALFRED.

Advice? — let me see!
You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.
About Parliament was it?

JOHN.

Hang Parliament! no,
The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

ALFRED.

What Bank?

JOHN.

Heavens! I know
You are careless; — but surely you have not forgotten,—
Or neglected . . . I warn'd you the whole thing was rotten.
You have drawn those deposits at least?

ALFRED.

No, I meant
To have written to-day; but the note shall be sent
To-morrow, however.

JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!
Too late! oh, what devil bewitch'd you to wait?

ALFRED.

Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .

JOHN.

Yes, I do.

ALFRED.

What! Sir Ridley? . . .

JOHN.

Smash'd, broken, blown up, bolted too.

ALFRED.

But his own niece? . . . In heaven's name, Jack . . .

JOHN.

Oh, I told you
The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

ALFRED.

Hold! you
Surely can't mean we are ruin'd?

JOHN.

Sit down!
A fortnight ago a report about town
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!
I at once wrote and warn'd you. Well, now let that pass
A run on the Bank about five days ago
Confirm'd my forebodings too terribly, though.
I drove down to the city at once: found the door
Of the Bank close: the Bank had stopp'd payment at four.
Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:
Warrant out for MacNab; but MacNab was abroad:
Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavor'd to get
Information: have learn'd nothing certain as yet —
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:
Or with those securities what he had done:
Or whether they had been already call'd out:
If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.
Twenty families ruin'd, they say: what was left, —
Unable to find any clew to the cleft
The old fox ran to earth in, — but join you as fast
As I could, my dear Alfred? *

VI.

He stopp'd here, aghast
At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face
Had grown livid; and glassy his eyes fix'd on space.
"Courage, courage!" . . . said John, . . . "bear the blow
like a man!"
And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred. There ran
Through that hand a quick tremor. "I bear it," he said,

* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,
Took place when Bad News as yet travell'd by horse;
Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzz'd on a wire,
Or Time was calcined by electrical fire;
Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,
Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

"But Matilda? the blow is to her!" And his head
Seem'd forced down, as he said it.

JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!
I half think I know the girl better than you.
She has courage enough — and to spare. She cares less
Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it:
If you did not avert, you may help her to bear it.

ALFRED.

I might have averted.

JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now
There is clearly no use in considering how,
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is here.
Broken shins are not mended by crying — that 's clear!
One has but to rub them, and get up again,
And push on — and not think too much of the pain.
And at least it is much that you see that to her
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must stir
And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her sake. Who knows?
Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I suppose
We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

"O Jack, I have been a brute idiot! a beast!
A fool! I have sinn'd, and to *her* I have sinn'd!
I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind!
And now, in a flash, I see all things!"
As though
To shut out the vision, he bow'd his head low

"He bowed his head low On his hands."

On his hands; and the great tears in silence roll'd on,
And fell momently, heavily, one after one.
John felt no desire to find instant relief
For the trouble he witness'd.
He guess'd, in the grief
Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt admission
Of some error demanding a heartfelt contrition:
Some oblivion perchance which could plead less excuse
To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use
Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and merely
The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.
So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down
The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own
Cordial heart for Matilda.
Thus, silently lost
In his anxious reflections, he cross'd and recross'd
The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung
O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among
The rich curls they were knotting and dragging: and there,
That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,
The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had grown
Unconscious of Alfred.
And so for a space
There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face
He stopp'd short, and bent on his cousin awhile
A pain'd sort of wistful, compassionate smile,
Approach'd him, — stood o'er him, — and suddenly laid
One hand on his shoulder —
"Where is she?" he said
Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears
And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears
In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,
Unable to answer.

"Where is she?" repeated
His cousin.
He motion'd his hand to the door;
"There, I think," he replied. Cousin John said no more,
And appear'd to relapse to his own cogitations,
Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.
So again there was silence.
A timepiece at last
Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.
Roused by them, he cast
A half-look to the dial; then quietly threw
His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew
The hands down from his face.
"It is time she should know
What has happen'd," he said, . . . "let us go to her now."
Alfred started at once to his feet.
Drawn and wan
Though his face, he look'd more than his wont was — a man.
Strong for once, in his weakness. Uplifted, fill'd through
With a manly resolve.
If that axiom be true
Of the "*Sum quia cogito,*" I must opine
That "*id sum quod cogito*": — that which, in fine,
A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of thought
And feeling, the man is himself.
He had fought
With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow
The survivor of much which that strife had laid low.
At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life
Which, though yet unfulfill'd, seem'd till then, in that name,
To be his, had he claim'd it. The man's dream of fame
And of power fell shatter'd before him; and only
There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely
In all save the love he could give her. The lord
Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record
That his first thought, and last, at that moment was not
Of the power and fame that seem'd lost to his lot.

But the love that was left to it; not of the pelf
He had cared for, yet squander'd; and not of himself,
But of her; as he murmur'd,
"One moment, dear Jack!
We have grown up from boyhood together. Our track
Has been through the same meadows in childhood: in youth
Through the same silent gateways, to manhood. In truth,
There is none that can know me as you do; and none
To whom I more wish to believe myself known.
Speak the truth; you are not wont to mince it, I know.
Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.
In despite of a wanton behavior, in spite
Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might
Have turn'd from me many a heart strong and true
As your own, I have never turn'd round and miss'd YOU
From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt
By my own blind and heedless self-will brought about.
Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake
Of those old recollections of boyhood that make
In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal
From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but feel
Might have sentenced our friendship to death long ago?
Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)
That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,
Your heart has divined in me something superior
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature
Not wholly expell'd by the world's usurpature?
Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire
For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire
Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust
Which life hath heap'd o'er it? Some one fact to trust
And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deem'd
The mere frivolous fool I so often have seem'd
To my own self?"

JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe,
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve

For having belied your true nature so long.
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!

"Do you think," he resumed . . . "what I feel while I speak
Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak
As these weak tears would seem to betoken it?"

JOHN.

No!

ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then. And now I will go
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

JOHN.

I do. But 't is late.
If she sleeps, you 'll not wake her?

ALFRED.

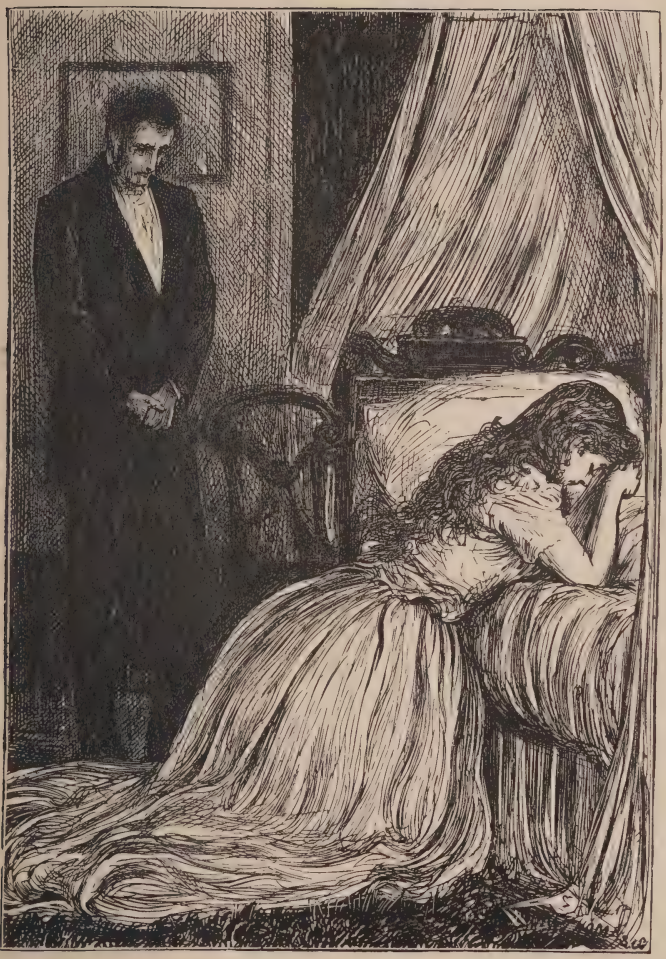
No, no! it will wait
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-morrow.
He open'd the door, and pass'd out.
Cousin John
Watch'd him wistful, and left him to seek her alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knock'd at her door,
He could hear no reply from within. Yet once more
He knock'd lightly. No answer. The handle he tried.
The door open'd: he enter'd the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the night,



"MATILDA WAS KNEELING; SO WRAPT IN DEEP PRAYER."

The pale lamp an indistinct radiance shed
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy bed
Matilda was kneeling; so wrapt in deep prayer
That she knew not her husband stood watching her there.
With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a faint
And unearthly effulgence which seem'd to acquaint
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made secure
By the presence of something angelic and pure.
And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the tomb
Where Love lies, than the lady that kneel'd in that gloom.
She had put off her dress; and she look'd to his eyes
Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise;
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,
And over them rippled her soft golden hair;
Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced
Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.
As the light that, from water reflected, forever
Trembles up through the tremulous reeds of a river,
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,
Through the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and dim,
Reproducing itself in the broken and bright
Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.
That sight
Bow'd his heart, bow'd his knee. Knowing scarce what he did,
To her side through the chamber he silently slid,
And knelt down beside her — and pray'd at her side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried
That her husband was near her; suffused with the blush
Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush
Where the tears sparkled yet.
As a young fawn uncouches,
Shy with fear, from the fern where some hunter approaches,
She shrank back; he caught her, and circling his arm
Round her waist, on her brow press'd one kiss long and warm.
Then her fear changed in impulse; and hiding her face

On his breast, she hung lock'd in a clinging embrace
With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as though
She fear'd, if their clasp were relax'd, he would go:
Her smooth naked shoulders, uncared for, convulsed
By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous minute.
"O Alfred, O Alfred! forgive me," she cried —
"Forgive me!"
"Forgive you, my poor child!" he sigh'd;
"But I never have blamed you for aught that I know,
And I have not one thought that reproaches you now."
From her arms he unwound himself gently. And so
He forced her down softly beside him. Below
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.
And he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,
"When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at length,
That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,
But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own
The weakness which thus to himself hath been shown?
From whom seek the strength which his need of is sore,
Although in his pride he might perish, before
He could plead for the one, or the other avow
'Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me now,
Do you join me in feeling, in that darken'd hour,
The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power
To be at his side, is the woman that shares
His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears
The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life
She has mingled her own with, — in short, that man's wife?"
"Yes," murmur'd Matilda, "O yes!"
"Then," he cried,
"This chamber in which we two sit, side by side
(And his arm, as he spoke, seem'd more softly to press her),
Is now a confessional — *you*, my confessor!"
"I?" she falter'd, and timidly lifted her head.
"Yes! but first answer one other question," he said:
"When a woman once feels that she is not alone;

That the heart of another is warm'd by her own;
That another feels with her whatever she feel,
And halves her existence in woe or in weal;
That a man for her sake will, so long as he lives,
Live to put forth his strength which the thought of her gives;
Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;
Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow;
Will that woman feel less than another, O say,
The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?
Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,
That they brighten the heart, though they darken the home?"
She turn'd, like a soft rainy heaven, on him
Eyes that smiled through fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.
"That woman," she murmur'd, "indeed were thrice blest!"
"Then courage, true wife of my heart!" to his breast
As he folded and gather'd her closely, he cried.
"For the refuge, to-night in these arms open'd wide
To your heart, can be never closed to it again,
And this room is for both an asylum! For when
I pass'd through that door, at the door I left there
A calamity, sudden, and heavy to bear.
One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,
We must face it henceforth: but it enters not here,
For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone
A heart which calamity leaves all your own!"
She started . . . "Calamity, Alfred! to you?"
"To both, my poor child, but 't will bring with it too
The courage, I trust, to subdue it."
"O speak!
Speak!" she falter'd in tones timid, anxious, and weak.
"O yet for a moment," he said, "hear me on!
Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,
Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,
That sport in the sunbeam, and play through the skies
While the skies smile, and heed not each other: at last,
When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky overcast,
Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings?
So indeed the morn found us, — poor frivolous things!

Now our sky is o'ercast, and our sunbeam is set,
And the night brings its darkness around us. Oh, yet,
Have we weather'd no storm through those twelve cloudless hours?
Yes; you, too, have wept!
"While the world was yet ours,
While its sun was upon us, its incense stream'd to us,
And its myriad voices of joy seem'd to woo us,
We stray'd from each other, too far, it may be,
Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see
How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how great
Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate!
But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,
Watching o'er us, to warn, and to rescue!
"That smile
Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you eyed
With resentment, an angel's they were at your side
And at mine; nor perchance is the day all so far,
When we both in our prayers, when most heartfelt they are,
May murmur the name of that woman now gone
From our sight evermore.
"Here, this evening, alone,
I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart
Unto yours, — from this clasp be it never to part!
Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,
But a prize richer far than that fortune has won
It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,
'T is the heart of my wife!" With suffused happy eyes
She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide apart,
And tenderly closing them round him, his heart
Clasp'd in one close embrace to her bosom; and there
Droop'd her head on his shoulder; and sobb'd.
Not despair,
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,
Flow'd in those happy tears, so oblivious she was
Of all save the sense of her own love! Anon,
However, his words rush'd back to her. "All gone,
The fortune you brought me!"

And eyes that were dim
With soft tears she upraised: but those tears were for *him*.
"Gone! my husband?" she said, "tell me all! see! I need,
To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,
Fuller sense of affliction."
"Poor innocent child!"
He kiss'd her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled,
As he told her the tale he had heard — something more
The gain found in loss of what gain lost of yore.
"Rest, my heart, and my brain, and my right hand for you;
And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do?
You know not, I knew not myself till this hour,
Which so sternly reveal'd it, my nature's full power."
"And I too," she murmur'd, "I too am no more
The mere infant at heart you have known me before.
I have suffer'd since then. I have learn'd much in life.
O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,
The heart I have learn'd as a woman to feel!
For I — love you, my husband!"
As though to conceal
Less from him, than herself, what that motion express'd,
She dropp'd her bright head, and hid all on his breast.
"O lovely as woman, beloved as wife!
Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!
If from eyes fix'd too long on this base earth thus far
You have miss'd your due homage, dear guardian star,
Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,
There I see you, and know you, and bless the light given
To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,
My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!"

XII.

How lovely she look'd in the lovely moonlight,
That stream'd thro' the pane from the blue balmy night!
How lovely she look'd in her own lovely youth,
As she clung to his side full of trust, and of truth!
How lovely to *him*, as he tenderly press'd

Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caress'd
The glittering tresses which now shaken loose
Shower'd gold in his hand, as he smooth'd them!

XIII.

O Muse,
Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart
'Twixt these two silent souls! There 's a joy beyond art,
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at least!
No music, save such as the nightingales sung,
Breath'd their bridals abroad; and no cresset, uphung,
Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was given
From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple heaven.
He open'd the casement: he led her with him,
Hush'd in heart, to the terrace, dipp'd cool in the dim
Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They heard
Aloof the invisible, rapturous bird,
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands; they saw
Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with cheer
From the throat of the vale; o'er the dark-sapphire sphere
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the sheep
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace; from unknown
Hollow glooms freshen'd odors around them were blown
Intermittingly; then the moon dropp'd from their sight,
Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light
Which no longer they needed to read on the face
Of each other's life's last revelation.
The place
Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that never
Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavor
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,

Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,
And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that halts not
His forces, how lovely soever the spot
Where their march lies — the wary, gray strategist, Time,
With the armies of Life, lay encamp'd — Grief and Crime,
Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; maturing,
For his great war with man, new surprises; securing
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe
To his last narrow refuge — the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and sweetly
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, completely
Confiding in that yet untrodden existence
Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resistance
And struggle; to-night, Love his hallow'd device
Hung forth, and proclaim'd his serene armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

When Lucile left Matilda, she sat for long hours
In her chamber, fatigued by long overwrought powers,
'Mid the signs of departure, about to turn back
To her old vacant life, on her old homeless track.
She felt her heart falter within her. She sat
Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly at
The insignia of royalty worn for a night;
Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle and light,
And the effort of passionate feigning; who thinks

Of her own meagre, rush-lighted garret, and shrinks
From the chill of the change that awaits her.

II.

From these
Oppressive, and comfortless, blank reveries,
Unable to sleep, she descended the stair
That led from her room to the garden.
The air,
With the chill of the dawn, yet unris'n, but at hand,
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead. The land
Lay in darkness and change, like a world in its grave:
No sound, save the voice of the long river wave,
And the crickets that sing all the night!
She stood still.
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curl'd on the hill
Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.
Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken look,
Didst thou read then in nature's weird heart-breaking book?
Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and who
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?
Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?
What leads forth in his season the bright Mazaroth?
Hath the darkness a dwelling, — save there, in those eyes?
And what name hath that half-reveal'd hope in the skies?
Ay, question, and listen! What answer?
The sound
Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled bound,
And the crickets that sing all the night.
There are hours
Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all
That to this race of worms, — stinging creatures, that crawl,
Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own stings, —
Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.
When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath pass'd

Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last;
When she traverses nature and space, till she stands
In the Chamber of Fate; where, through tremulous hands,
Hum the threads from an old-fashion'd distaff uncurl'd,
And those three blind old women sit spinning the world.

III.

The dark was blanch'd wan, overhead. One green star
Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar;
The spirits of change, and of awe, with faint breath,
Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.
The spirits of awe and of change were around,
And about, and upon her.
A dull muffled sound,
And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,
And she felt herself fix'd by the hot hollow eyes
Of the Frenchman before her: those eyes seem'd to burn,
And scorch out the darkness between them, and turn
Into fire as they fix'd her. He look'd like the shade
Of a creature by fancy from solitude made,
And sent forth by the darkness to scare and oppress
Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

IV.

"At last, then — at last, and alone, — I and thou,
Lucile de Nevers, have we met?
"Hush! I know
Not for me was the tryst. Never mind! it is mine;
And whatever led hither those proud steps of thine,
They remove not, until we have spoken. My hour
Is come; and it holds thee and me in its power,
As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'T is well!
The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell
Of her first lover's vows listen'd, hush'd with delight,
When soft stars were brightly uphanging the night,
Never listen'd, I swear, more unquestioningly,

Than thy fate hath compell'd thee to listen to me!"
To the sound of his voice, as though out of a dream,
She appear'd with a start to awaken.
The stream,
When he ceased, took the night with its moaning again,
Like the voices of spirits departing in pain.
"Continue," she answer'd, "I listen to hear."
For a moment he did not reply.
Through the drear
And dim light between them, she saw that his face
Was disturb'd. To and fro he continued to pace,
With his arms folded close, and the low restless stride
Of a panther, in circles around her, first wide,
Then narrower, nearer, and quicker. At last
He stood still, and one long look upon her he cast.
"Lucile, dost thou dare to look into my face?
Is the sight so repugnant? ha, well! Canst thou trace
One word of thy writing in this wicked scroll,
With thine own name scrawl'd through it, defacing a soul?"
In his face there was something so wrathful and wild,
That the sight of it scared her.
He saw it, and smiled,
And then turn'd him from her, renewing again
That short restless stride; as though searching in vain
For the point of some purpose within him.
"Lucile,
You shudder to look in my face: do you feel
No reproach when you look in your own heart?"
"No, Duke,
In my conscience I do not deserve your rebuke:
Not yours!" she replied.
"No," he mutter'd again,
"Gentle justice! you first bid Life hope not, and then
To Despair you say 'Act not!'"

v.

He watch'd her awhile
With a chill sort of restless and suffering smile.

They stood by the wall of the garden. The skies,
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague prophecies
Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon had long set,
And all in a glimmering light, pale, and wet
With the night-dews, the white roses sullenly loom'd
Round about her. She spoke not. At length he resumed.
"Wretched creatures we are! I and thou — one and all!
Only able to injure each other, and fall
Soon or late, in that void which ourselves we prepare
For the souls that we boast of! weak insects we are!
O heaven! and what has become of them? all
Those instincts of Eden surviving the Fall:
That glorious faith in inherited things:
That sense in the soul of the length of her wings;
Gone! all gone! and the wail of the night wind sounds human,
Bewailing those once nightly visitants! Woman,
Woman, what hast thou done with my youth? Give again,
Give me back the young heart that I gave thee . . . in vain!"
"Duke!" she falter'd.
"Yes, yes!" he went on, "I was not
Always thus! what I once was, I have not forgot."

VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there stirr'd
Through his voice an emotion that swept every word
Into one angry wail; as, with feverish change,
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.
"Woe to him, in whose nature, once kindled, the torch
Of Passion burns downward to blacken and scorch!
But shame, shame and sorrow, O woman, to thee
Whose hand sow'd the seed of destruction in me!
Whose lip taught the lesson of falsehood to mine!
Whose looks made me doubt lies that look'd so divine!
My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep:
And if tears I mistrust, 't is that thou too canst weep!
Well! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake

In the love of a man, what more change need it make
In the steps of his soul through the course love began,
Than all other mistakes in the life of a man?
And I said to myself, 'I am young yet: too young
To have wholly survived my own portion among
The great needs of man's life, or exhausted its joys;
What is broken? one only of youth's pleasant toys!
Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,
For one passion survived? No! the roses will blow
As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,
Not less sweetly for one blossom cancell'd from Spring!
Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet remains
All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The plains
And the hills with each summer their verdure renew.
Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as they do,
Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living divine
Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be the sign!'

"Vain! all vain! . . . For when, laughing, the wine I would quaff,
I remember'd too well all it cost me to laugh.
Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,
Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me they stirr'd,
In the night-wind, the starlight, the murmurs of even,
In the ardors of earth, and the languors of heaven,
I could trace nothing more, nothing more through the spheres,
But the sound of old sobs, and the tracks of old tears!
It was with me the night long in dreaming or waking,
It abided in loathing, when daylight was breaking,
The burthen of the bitterness in me! Behold,
All my days were become as a tale that is told.
And I said to my sight, 'No good thing shalt thou see,
For the noonday is turnéd to darkness in me.
In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made.'
And I said to the grave, 'Lo, my father!' and said
To the worm, 'Lo, my sister!' The dust to the dust,
And one end to the wicked shall be with the just!"

VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night,
And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct light
A voice clear, and tender, and pure with a tone
Of ineffable pity replied to his own.
"And say you, and deem you, that I wreck'd your life?
Alas! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife
By a fraud of the heart which could yield you alone
For the love in your nature a lie in my own,
Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you worse?
Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,
For I then should have wrong'd you!"
"Wrong'd! ah, is it so?
You could never have loved me?"
"Duke!"
"Never? oh no!"
(He broke into a fierce, angry laugh, as he said)
"Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you: you led
My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,
All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power
Shut up in that cold face of yours! was this well?
But enough! not on you would I vent the wild hell
Which has grown in my heart. Oh that man, first and last
He tramples in triumph my life! he has cast
His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass!
My hate yet may find him!"
She murmur'd, "Alas!
These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply.
Enough, Duc de Luvois! farewell. I shall try
To forget every word I have heard, every sight
That has grieved and appall'd me in this wretched night
Which must witness our final farewell. May you, Duke,
Never know greater cause your own heart to rebuke
Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have had!
Adieu!"
"Stay, Lucile, stay!" . . . he groaned, . . . "I am mad,
Brutalized, blind with pain! I know not what I said.

I meant it not. But" (he moan'd, drooping his head)
"Forgive me! I—have I so wrong'd you, Lucile?
I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me!"
"I feel
Only sad, very sad to the soul," she said, "far,
Far too sad for resentment."
"Yet stand as you are
One moment," he murmur'd. "I think, could I gaze
Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days
Would come back upon me, and this scorching heart
Free itself in hot tears. Do not, do not depart
Thus, Lucile! stay one moment. I know why you shrink,
Why you shudder; I read in your face what you think.
Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,
Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.
I lied. And the truth, now, could justify nought.
There are battles, it may be, in which to have fought
Is more shameful than, simply, to fail. Yet, Lucile,
Had you help'd me to bear what you forced me to feel—"
"Could I help you," she murmur'd, "but what can I say
That your life will respond to?" "My life?" he sigh'd,
"Nay,
My life hath brought forth only evil, and there
The wild wind hath planted the wild weed: yet ere
You exclaim, 'Fling the weed to the flames,' think again
Why the field is so barren. With all other men
First love, though it perish from life, only goes
Like the primrose that falls to make way for the rose.
For a man, at least most men, may love on through life:
Love in fame; love in knowledge; in work: earth is rife
With labor, and therefore, with love, for a man.
If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan
Of man's life includes love in all objects! But I?
All such loves from my life through its whole destiny
Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas!
Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that pass!
It perish'd, and all perish'd with it. Ambition?
Wealth left nothing to add to my social condition.

Fame? But fame in itself presupposes some great
Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State?
I, to cringe to an upstart? The Camp? I, to draw
From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of Luvois
To defend usurpation? Books, then? Science, Art?
But, alas! I was fashion'd for action: my heart,
Wither'd thing though it be, I should hardly compress
'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics: life's stress
Needs scope, not contraction! what rests? to wear out
At some dark northern court an existence, no doubt,
In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause
As hopeless as is my own life! By the laws
Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,
I am what I am!"

VIII.

For a while she was mute.
Then she answer'd, "We are our own fates. Our own deeds
Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made not for men's creeds,
But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might say
That all life attests, that 'the will makes the way.'
Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,
Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less worth
Our upholding, because the white lily no more
Is as sacred as all that it bloom'd for of yore?
Yet be that as it may be; I cannot perchance
Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and France
Has for me simpler duties. Large hope, though, Eugène
De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in pain,
Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul
That the great master hand which sweeps over the whole
Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch
To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means to fetch
Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,
Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,
Whose faculties, flaccid it may be, if less
Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had fail'd to express

Just the one note the great final harmony needs.
And what best proves there 's life in a heart ? — that it bleeds.
Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,
Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain!
Cease the sin with the sorrow! See morning begin!
Pain must burn itself out if not fuell'd by sin.
There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon light.
Let hate and despondency die with the night!"

He was moved by her words. As some poor wretch confined
In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose mind
Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear
A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,
And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,
Singing through the caged lattice a once well-known strain,
Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until
The mind's ruin'd crevices graciously fill
With music and memory, and, as it were,
The long-troubled spirit grows slowly aware
Of the mockery round it, and shrinks from each thing
It once sought, — the poor idiot who pass'd for a king,
Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now confess'd
A madman more painfully mad than the rest, —
So the sound of her voice, as it there wander'd o'er
His echoing heart, seem'd in part to restore
The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole
Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul
Reflected on his: he appear'd to awake
From a dream, and perceived he had dream'd a mistake:
His spirit was soften'd, yet troubled in him:
He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim,
But he murmur'd . . .
"Lucile, not for me that sun's light
Which reveals — not restores — the wild havoc of night.
There are some creatures born for the night, not the day.
Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray,
And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow tower
Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my dower.

Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by which eyes
Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognize
Enough desolation."

IX.

"The pride that claims here
On earth to itself (howsoever severe
To itself it may be) God's dread office and right
Of punishing sin, is a sin in heaven's sight,
And against heaven's service.
"Eugène de Luvois,
Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the law.
Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all
His own doomsman."
Her words seem'd to fall
With the weight of tears in them.
He look'd up, and saw
That sad serene countenance, mournful as law
And tender as pity, bow'd o'er him: and heard
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.

X.

"Vulgar natures alone suffer vainly.
"Eugène,"
She continued, "in life we have met once again,
And once more life parts us. Yon day-spring for me
Lifts the veil of a future in which it may be
We shall meet nevermore. Grant, oh grant to me yet
The belief that it is not in vain we have met!
I plead for the future. A new horoscope
I would cast: will you read it? I plead for a hope:
I plead for a memory; yours, yours alone,
To restore or to spare. Let the hope be your own,
Be the memory mine.
"Once of yore, when for man
Faith yet lived, ere this age of the sluggard began,

Men, aroused to the knowledge of evil, fled far
From the fading rose-gardens of sense, to the war
With the Pagan, the cave in the desert, and sought
Not repose, but employment in action or thought,
Life's strong earnest, in all things! oh think not of me,
But yourself! for I plead for your own destiny:
I plead for your life, with its duties undone,
With its claims unappeased, and its trophies unwon;
And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead
For all that you miss, and for all that you need."

XI.

Through the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she spoke,
A clear, chilly chime from a church-turret broke;
And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the bell,
On his ear, where he kneel'd, softly, soothingly fell.
All within him was wild and confused, as within
A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,
Where, passing, wild travellers paused, over-night,
To quaff and carouse; in each socket each light
Is extinct; crash'd the glasses, and scrawl'd is the wall
With wild ribald ballads · serenely o'er all,
For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light creeps faint
Through the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a saint,
Seen through some broken frame, appears noting meanwhile
The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.
And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness half drawn
Oped behind her; and pure as the pure light of dawn
She stood, bathed in morning, and seem'd to his eyes
From their sight to be melting away in the skies
That expanded around her.

XII.

There pass'd through his head
A fancy — a vision. That woman was dead
He had loved long ago — loved and lost! dead to him,

Dead to all the life left him; but there, in the dim
Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit; 't was hers;
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers:
"O soul to its sources departing away!
Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.
I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,
One hope to my heart. But in this parting hour
I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.
Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,
Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart denies,
Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon skies,
This wild night is passing away while I speak:
Lo, above us, the day-spring beginning to break!
Something wakens within me, and warms to the beam
Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream?
I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark
Of a new light within me to solace the dark
Unto which I return; or perchance it may be
The last spark of fires half extinguish'd in me.
I know not. Thou goest thy way: I my own:
For good or for evil, I know not. Alone
This I know; we are parting. I wish'd to say more,
But no matter! 't will pass. All between us is o'er.
Forget the wild words of to-night. 'T was the pain
For long years hoarded up, that rush'd from me again.
I was unjust: forgive me. Spare now to reprove
Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not love,
That you thwarted this night. What is done is now done.
Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.
I was madden'd, delirious! I saw you return
To him — not to me; and I felt my heart burn
With a fierce thirst for vengeance — and thus . . . let it pass!
Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments, alas!
Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose
'T is to meet nevermore. Is it not so? Who knows,
Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise flies?
Or what altars of his in the desert may rise?
Is it not so, Lucile? Well, well! Thus then we part
Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from heart!"

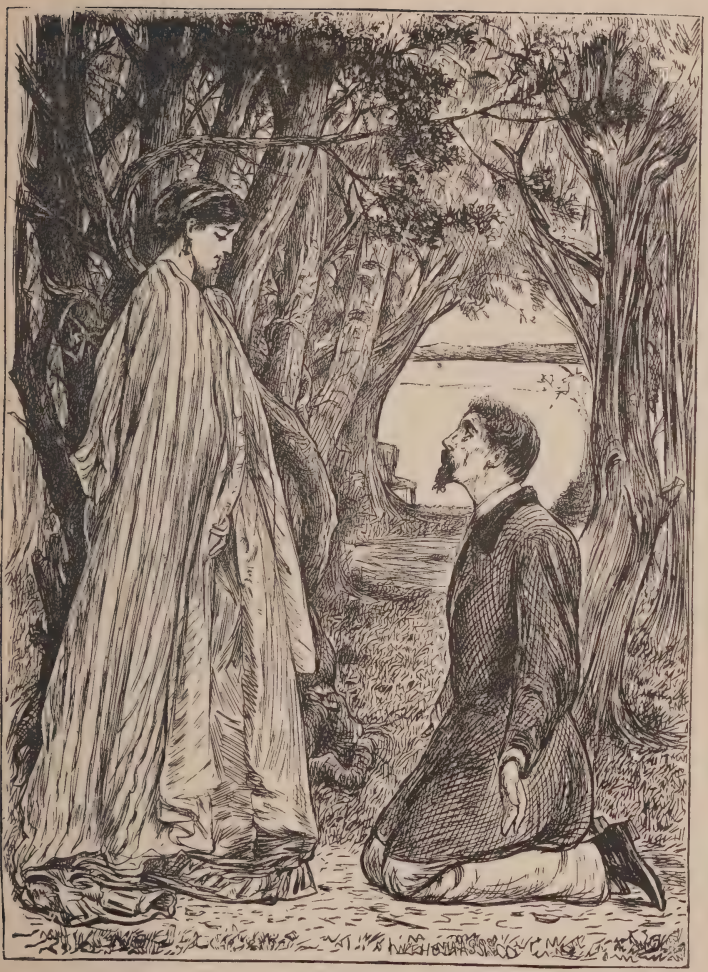
XIII.

And again clearer far than the chime of the bell,
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.
"Our two paths must part us, Eugène; for my own
Seems no more through that world in which henceforth alone
You must work out (as now I believe that you will)
The hope which you speak of. That work I shall still
(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.
Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I say,
That the great moral combat between human life
And each human soul must be single. The strife
None can share, though by all its results may be known.
When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.
I say not, indeed, we shall meet nevermore,
For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,
I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet
By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the street,
Or in solitude even, but never again
Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met, Eugène.
For we know not the way we are going, nor yet
Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life hath set
No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,
I will promise: whatever your path, or my own,
If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance
That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and lance
Lost or shatter'd, borne down by the stress of the war,
You falter and hesitate, if from afar
I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)
O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see
That my presence could rescue, support you, or guide,
In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,
To warn, if you will, or incite, or control;
And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul!"

XIV.

The voice ceased.

He uplifted his eyes.



"Our two paths must part us, Eugène."

All alone
He stood on the bare edge of dawn. She was gone,
Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.
And at once, in her place, was the Sunrise! It rose
In its sumptuous splendor and solemn repose,
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,
Realms of rose, in the Orient! And breathless, and bold,
While the great gates of heaven roll'd back one by one,
The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun!
Thrice holy Eospheros! Light's reign began
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the man.
The dawn on the mountains! the dawn everywhere!
Light! silence! the fresh innovations of air!
O earth, and O ether! A butterfly breeze
Floated up, flutter'd down, and poised blithe on the trees.
Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp-rippled stream,
Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill-slope,
The spirits of morning were whispering, "*Hope!*"

XV.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she stood
But a moment before, and where now roll'd the flood
Of the sunrise all golden, he seem'd to behold,
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold
Of his own youth, — its ardors — its promise of fame —
Its ancestral ambition; and France by the name
Of his sires seem'd to call him. There, hover'd in light,
That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright
And Aurorean clouds, which themselves seem'd to be
Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he
Had once dwelt, a native!
There, rooted and bound
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it! Around
The rims of the sunrise it hover'd and shone
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone;

And he — as the body may yearn for the soul,
So he yearn'd to embody that image. His whole
Heart arose to regain it.
"And is it too late?"
No! for Time is a fiction, and limits not fate.
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to regain
The pure source of spirit, there *is* no TOO LATE.
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him
Arose to that image. The image waned dim
Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense — awed, amazed —
Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

CANTO VI.

I.

MAN is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks
That have shatter'd creation, and shapen it, rocks.
He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes: her solitudes spread
To daunt him: her forces dispute his command:
Her snows fall to freeze him: her suns burn to brand:
Her seas yawn to engulf him: her rocks rise to crush:
And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush
On their startled invader.
In lone Malabar,
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,

'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw
(Striped and spotted destroyers !) he sees, pale with awe,
On the menacing edge of a fiery sky
Grim Doorga, blue-limb'd and red-handed, go by,
And the first thing he worships is Terror.
Anon,
Still impell'd by necessity hungrily on,
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.
From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul:
Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll!
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high on
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion:
And man, conquering Terror, is worshipp'd by man.

A camp has this world been since first it began!
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian; at peace,
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece;
But, warring his way through a world's destinies,
Lo from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise
Domes of empiry, dower'd with science and art,
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart!

New realms to man's soul have been conquer'd. But those
Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her own,
And bold must the man be that braves the Unknown!
Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
But brows have ached for it, and souls toil'd and striven;
And many have striven, and many have fail'd,
And many died, slain by the truth they assail'd.
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his place
And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face
With a new foe — himself!
Nor may man on his shield
Ever rest, for his foe is forever afield,
Danger ever at hand, till the armèd Archangel
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of pleasure.
Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the measure!
Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me
One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee
Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,
Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime
In the light of the aureole over her head,
Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh and red
Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold
The shrill clanging curtains of war!
And behold
A vision!
The antique Heraclean seats;
And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those fleets,
Which said to the winds, "Be ye, too, Genoese!"
And the red angry sands of the chafed Chersonese;
And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied
Round the Armies of England and France, side by side
Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast!)
Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the East.

III.

Since that sunrise, which rose through the calm linden stems
O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden at Ems,
Through twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,
This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,
And the fates that I sing of have flow'd with the fates
Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates
Of that doom'd and heroical city, in which
(Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the ditch!)
At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,
Whom the huntsmen have hemm'd round at last in his lair.

IV.

A fang'd, arid plain, sapp'd with underground fire,
Soak'd with snow, torn with shot, mash'd to one gory mire!

There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,
While those two famish'd ogres — the Siege, the Defence,
Face to face, through a vapor frore, dismal, and dun,
Glare, scenting the breath of each other.
The one
Double-bodied, two-headed — by separate ways
Winding, serpent-wise, nearer; the other, each day's
Sullen toil adding size to, — concentrated, solid,
Indefatigable — the brass-fronted, embodied,
And audible *αυτος* gone sombrely forth
To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north!

V.

In the dawn of a moody October, a pale
Ghostly motionless vapor began to prevail
Over city and camp; like the garment of death
Which (is formed by) the face it conceals.
'T was the breath
War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;
Wherethrough, here and there, flash'd an eye of red fire,
And closed, from some rampart beginning to bellow
Hoarse challenge; replied to anon, through the yellow
And sulphurous twilight: till day reel'd and rock'd,
And roar'd into dark. Then the midnight was mock'd
With fierce apparitions. Ring'd round by a rain
Of red fire, and of iron, the murtherous plain
Flared with fitful combustion; where fitfully fell
Afar off the fatal, disgorged *scharpenelle*,
And fired the horizon, and singed the coil'd gloom
With wings of swift flame round that City of Doom.

VI.

So the day — so the night! So by night, so by day,
With stern patient pathos, while time wears away,
In the trench flooded through, in the wind where it wails,
In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails

Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and pain,
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze chain
Of those terrible siege-lines!
No change to that toil
Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous soil,
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the maim'd,
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claim'd
By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb,
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.
And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the brave:
And many a young heart has glutted the grave:
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous in story.

VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set through the camp
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,
That seems searching for something it never can find.
The midnight is turning: the lamp is nigh spent:
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent
Lies a young British soldier whose sword . . .
In this place
However, my Muse is compell'd to retrace
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.
The shock which had suddenly shatter'd at last
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature,
Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature
The real man, conceal'd till that moment beneath
All he yet had appear'd. From the gay broider'd sheath
Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summon'd forth by a blow.
And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.

The wife gain'd a husband, the husband a wife,
In that home which, though humbled and narrow'd by fate,
Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their state,
But large their possessions.
Sir Ridley, forgiven
By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek speech
The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from reach
Of the law, died abroad.
Cousin John, heart and hand,
Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took his stand
By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and friend
Of the home he both shared and assured, to the end,
With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave meanwhile
Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's faithful smile
Late in life, he began life in earnest; and still,
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,
Through long, and laborious, and difficult days,
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,
Work'd his way through the world; till at last he began
(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims from man),
After years of unwitness'd, unwearied endeavor,
Years impassion'd yet patient, to realize ever
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion
The reflex of powers in himself — that dominion
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his youth
In his manhood renew'd, fame and fortune he won
Working only for home, love, and duty.
One son
Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank joy,
The darling of young soldier comrades, just glanced
Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it chanced
That a blight sharp and sudden was breath'd o'er the bloom
Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:
No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,

Captious April engenders; but deep as his own
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.
When first a wild war-note through England was sent,
He, transferring without either token or word,
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,
Had march'd forth, with eyes that saw death in the star
Whence others sought glory. Thus, fighting, he fell
On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell
By what miracle, breathing, though shatter'd, and borne
To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and torn.
Where for long days and nights, with the wound in his side,
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,
In the young heart was rankling; for there, of a truth,
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,
Lay ensheath'd: and that love, ever fretting its sheath,
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore through and through
There are loves in man's life for which time can renew
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, though, in love,
Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move,
Though earthquakes may shatter the shrine.
Whence or how
Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now.

X.

Oh is it a phantom? a dream of the night?
A vision which fever hath fashion'd to sight?
The wind wailing ever, with motion uncertain,
Sways sighingly there the drench'd tent's tatter'd curtain,
To and fro, up and down.
But it is not the wind

That is lifting it now : and it is not the mind
That hath moulded that vision.
A pale woman enters.
As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concentres
Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dimmer
There, all in a slumberous and shadowy glimmer,
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands
By his bedside, all silent. She lays her white hands
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing
Softly, softly the sore wounds : the hot blood-stain'd dressing
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals
Through the rack'd weary frame : and, throughout it, he feels
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighborhood.
Something smooths the toss'd pillow. Beneath a gray hood
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent o'er him,
And thrill through and through him. The sweet form before him,
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping !
A soft voice says . . . " Sleep ! "
And he sleeps : he is sleeping

XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there :
Still that pale woman moves not. A minist'ring care
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering
The aspect of all things around him.
Revering
Some power unknown and benignant, he bless'd
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest
Having loosen'd the mind's tangled meshes, he faintly
Sigh'd . . . " Say what thou art, blessed dream of a saintly
And minist'ring spirit ! "
A whisper serene
Slid, softer than silence . . . " The Sœur Seraphine,
A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire

Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy sire,
For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.
Thou didst not shun death: shun not life. 'T is more brave
To live, than to die. Sleep!"

He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He waken'd again, when the dawn was just steeping
The skies with chill splendor. And there, never flitting,
Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.
As the dawn to the darkness, so life seem'd returning
Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp, yet burning,
Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.

He said,
"If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,
Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing
Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing
Thy mission of mercy! whence art thou?"

"O son
Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One
Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:
To thee, and to others, alive yet" . . . she said . . .
"So long as there liveth the poor gift in me
Of this ministration; to them, and to thee,
Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose vocation
Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation.
Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,
There her land! there her kindred!"

She bent down to smooth
The hot pillow; and added . . . "Yet more than another
Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,
I knew them — I know them."

"Oh can it be? you!
My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,
You know them?"

She bow'd, half averting, her head
In silence

He brokenly, timidly said,
"Do they know I am thus?"
"Hush!" . . . she smiled, as she drew
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be true?
That beloved and familiar writing!
He burst
Into tears . . . "My poor mother — my father! the worst
Will have reach'd them!"
"No, no!" she exclaim'd with a smile,
"They know you are living; they know that meanwhile
I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep not!"
But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot
Fever'd brow of the boy weeping wildly is press'd.
There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:
And he hears, as it were between smiling and weeping,
The calm voice say . . . "Sleep!"
And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

XIII.

And day follow'd day. And, as wave follows wave,
With the tide, day by day, life, reissuing, drave
Through that young hardy frame novel currents of health.
Yet some strange obstruction, which life's self by stealth
Seem'd to cherish, impeded life's progress. And still
A feebleness, less of the frame than the will,
Clung about the sick man: hid and harbor'd within
The sad hollow eyes: pinch'd the cheek pale and thin:
And clothed the wan fingers with languor.
And there,
Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,
And so gentle of hand, sat the Sœur Seraphine!

XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace

Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the whole
Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the soul
Seem'd to fill with its own light, like some sunny fountain
Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain
That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,
And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.
So that, watching that face, you would scarce pause to guess
The years which its calm careworn lines might express,
Feeling only what suffering with these must have past
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out
His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,
The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own
Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone
Of her voice moved the silence.
She said . . . "I have heal'd
These wounds of the body. Why hast thou conceal'd,
Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?
Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?"
He winced, with a start,
As of one that is suddenly touched on the spot
From which every nerve derives suffering.
"What?
Lies my heart, then, so bare?" he moan'd bitterly.
"Nay,"
With compassionate accents she hasten'd to say,
"Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow, young man,
So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan
Her features, yet know them not?
"Oh, was it spoken,
'*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the broken!*'
Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,
When we leave the bruised hearts, if we bind the bruised bone?
Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?
Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers, that we hold
To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still

To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill
Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art
Help'd of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.
Trust to me!" (His two feeble hands in her own
She drew gently.) "Trust to me!" (she said, with soft tone):
"I am not so dead in remembrance to all
I have died to in this world, but what I recall
Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,
To grieve for both — save from both haply! The dial
Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.
Life's sorrows still fluctuate: God's love does not.
And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.
Looking up to this light, which is common to all,
And down to these shadows, on each side, that fall
In time's silent circle, so various for each,
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach
So far, but what light lies beyond them forever?
Trust to me! Oh, if in this hour I endeavor
To trace the shade creeping across the young life
Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watch'd through its strife
With the shadow of death, 't is with this faith alone,
That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.
Trust to me!"

She paused: he was weeping. Small need
Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,
Had those gentle accents to win from his pale
And parch'd, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief tale
Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,
And in words few as may be shall straightway be told.

XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace
Was driven from Europe, a young girl — the niece
Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile
By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a while
With a lady allied to her race — an old dame

Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,
In the Faubourg Saint Germain.
Upon that fair child,
From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.
One uncle their place in her life had supplied,
And their place in her heart: she had grown at his side,
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,
From childhood to girlhood.
This fair orphan ward
Seem'd the sole human creature that lived in the heart
Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could impart
One ray of response to the eyes which, above
Her fair infant forehead, look'd down with a love
That seem'd almost stern, so intense was its chill
Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the court-yard; the chambers were bare
In that ancient mansion; when first the stern tread
Of its owner awaken'd their echoes long dead:
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a brother),
Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother
Had placed on his bosom. 'T was said — right or wrong —
That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,
To which, as a stranger, its lord now return'd,
In years yet recall'd, through loud midnights had burn'd
The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wander'd through
Those desolate chambers; and calm and severe
Was the life of their inmate.
Men now saw appear
Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,
Which seem'd to lock up in a cold iron case
Tears harden'd to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,
His severity seem'd to be trebly severe
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,
Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.

The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.
Yet he seem'd in the midst of his good deeds to stand
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.
There appear'd some inscrutable flaw in the plan
Of his life, that love fail'd to pass over.
That child
Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him; smiled
To his frown, and dispell'd it.
The sweet sportive elf
Seem'd the type of some joy lost, and miss'd, in himself.
Ever welcome he suffer'd her glad face to glide
In on hours when to others his door was denied:
And many a time with a mute moody look
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had pass'd o'er that childhood before
A change came among them. A letter, which bore
Sudden consequence with it, one morning was placed
In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced
To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone
After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.
Weeks pass'd. When he came back again he return'd
With a tall ancient dame, from whose lips the child learn'd
That they were of the same race and name. With a face
Sad and anxious, to this wither'd stock of the race
He confided the orphan, and left them alone
In the old lonely house.
In a few days 't was known,
To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watchword
And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword
For a Fatherland father'd no more (such is fate!)
By legitimate parents.

And meanwhile, elate
And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away: —
"To the life of inaction farewell! After all,
Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,
But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,
In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.
Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in — the lance
Of the Arab to follow! I go! *Vive la France!*"

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as years fled,
'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women led
Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child grew
Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees
In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,
And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,
With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!
Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . "Let Constance
Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France
I may be ere the close of the year. I confide
My life's treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,
The world which we live in."
To Paris then came
Constance to abide with that old stately dame
In that old stately Faubourg.
The young Englishman
Thus met her. 'T was there their acquaintance began,
There it closed. That old miracle — Love-at-first-sight
Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright
Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden
Nor check'd, the young soldier was graciously bidden
An habitual guest to that house by the dame.
His own candid graces, the world-honor'd name
Of his father (in him not dishonor'd) were both
Fair titles to favor. His love, nothing loath,

CONSTANCE.

The old lady observed, was return'd by Constance.
And as the child's uncle his absence from France
Yet prolong'd, she (thus easing long self-gratulation)
Wrote to him a lengthen'd and moving narration
Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer:
His father's fair fame; the boy's deference to her;
His love for Constance, — unaffected, sincere;
And the girl's love for him, read by her in those clear
Limpid eyes; then the pleasure with which she awaited
Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,
Brief, stern; such as stunn'd and astonish'd the dame.

"Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day
You receive this. Until my return she may stay
At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever
To behold me again, understand, she will never
Wed that man.
"You have broken faith with me. Farewell!"

No appeal from that sentence.
It needs not to tell
The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover:
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.

Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face
Of a life, where invisible hands seem'd to trace
O'er the threshold, these words . . . "Hope no more!"
Unreturn'd
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would have spurn'd
That weakness which suffers a woman to lie
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek

Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,
Beat him down, and destroy'd him?
News reach'd him indeed,
Through a comrade, who brought him a letter to read
From the dame who had care of Constance (it was one
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which said
That Constance, although never a murmur betray'd
What she suffer'd, in silence grew paler each day,
And seem'd visibly drooping and dying away.
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'T was told
With such broken, passionate words, as unfold
In glimpses alone, a coil'd grief. Through each pause
Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,
The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,
And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-roof
At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,
The sick man, exhausted, droop'd backward his head,
And fell into a feverish slumber.
Long while
Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The still smile
That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face
And make it like heaven, was fled from its place
In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there
Seem'd to darken the lines of long sorrow and care,
As low to herself she sigh'd . . .
"Hath it, Eugène,
Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet, all in vain!
Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a man,
And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I can?
Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!
And then — soul of mine, whither? whither?

XVIII.

Large, slow,
Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.
"*Here*, at least, I have fail'd not" . . . she mused . . . "this is well!"
She drew from her bosom two letters.
In one,
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.
"The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!
The hope of a home saved by thee — of a heart
Which hath never since then (thrice endear'd as thou art!)
Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! . . . save my son!
And if not" . . . the letter went brokenly on,
"Heaven help us!"
Then follow'd, from Alfred, a few
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,
So unlike his own: how in beauty and truth
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave!
And how he had striven his son's youth to save
From the errors so sadly redeem'd in his own,
And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,
In whose youth he had garner'd his age, he had seem'd
To be bless'd by a pledge that the past was redeem'd,
And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak
Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seem'd to break
Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back again
The hopes of the future. To sue for consent
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might relent
Experience rejected . . . "My life for the boy's!"
(He exclaim'd); "for I die with my son, if he dies!
Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!
Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save my son!"

XIX.

"Ay!" murmur'd the Sœur Seraphine . . . "heart to heart!
There, at least, I have fail'd not! Fulfill'd is my part?
Accomplish'd my mission? One act crowns the whole.
Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to soul!"
She knelt down, and pray'd. Still the boy slumber'd on.
Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent
O'er the daily reports, in his well-order'd tent
There sits a French General — bronzed by the sun
And sear'd by the sands of Algeria. One
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be
The idol, the darling, the dream and the star
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,
And wary in council. He enter'd, indeed,
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)
The Army of France: and had risen, in part
From a singular aptitude proved for the art
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;
Partly, too, from a name and position which France
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won
With many a wound, trench'd in many a scar,
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to bear
Smiling token of provident order and care

All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing bands.
In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,
The messengers come, and the messengers go,
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:
To report how the sapper contends with the soil
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring
In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,
Moving all.
He is bending his brow o'er some plan
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.
The officer standing beside him is fain
To refer to the angel solicitous cares
Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares
To be known through the camp as a seraph of grace:
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each place
Where suffering is seen, silent, active — the Sœur . . .
Sœur . . . how do they call her?
"Ay, truly, of her
I have heard much," the General, musing, replies;
"And we owe her already (unless rumor lies)
The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean . . .
Ay, how do they call her? . . . the Sœur — Seraphine
(Is it not so?). I rarely forget names once heard."

"Yes; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant."
"On my word,
I have much wish'd to see her. I fancy I trace,
In some facts traced to her, something more than the grace
Of an angel: I mean an acute human mind,
Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find,
And, if possible, let her come to me. We shall,
I think, aid each other."
"*Oui, mon Général:*
I believe she has lately obtain'd the permission
To tend some sick man in the Second Division
Of our Ally: they say a relation."

"Ay, so?
A relation?"
"'T is said so."
"The name do you know?"
"*Non, mon Général.*"
While they spoke yet, there went
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.
"A Sister of Charity craves, in a case
Of urgent and serious importance, the grace
Of brief private speech with the General there.
Will the General speak with her?"
"Bid her declare
Her mission."
"She will not. She craves to be seen
And be heard."
"Well, her name then?"
"The Sœur Seraphine."
"Clear the tent. She may enter."

XXII.

The tent has been clear'd
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,
A sable long silver'd: and press'd down his brow
On his hand, heavy vein'd. All his countenance, now
Unwitness'd, at once fell dejected, and dreary,
As a curtain let fall by a hand that 's grown weary,
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepress'd,
Steals th' impatient quick sigh, which reveals in man's breast
A conflict conceal'd, an experience at strife
With itself, — the vex'd heart's passing protest on life.
He turn'd to his papers. He heard the light tread
Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,
Said, "Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known
To the hearts of our soldiers; nor less to my own.
I have much wish'd to see you. I owe you some thanks:
In the name of all those you have saved to our ranks

I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?"
The nun
Paused silent. The General eyed her anon
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change
Darken'd over his features. He mutter'd . . . "Strange! strange!
Any face should so strongly remind me of *her!*
Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?
Does it move as of old? Psha!
"Sit, Sister! I wait
Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State
The cause why you seek me?"
"The cause? ay, the cause!"
She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —
As one who, awaked unawares, would put back
The sleep that forever returns in the track
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not the less
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their stress,
Like doves to a penthouse, — a movement she made,
Less toward him than away from herself; droop'd her head
And folded her hands on her bosom: long, spare,
Fatigued, mournful hands! Not a stream of stray hair
Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the face
Which they bound and lock'd up in a rigid white case.
She fix'd her eyes on him. There crept a vague awe
O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.
"Eugène de Luvois,
The cause which recalls me again to your side,
Is a promise that rests unfulfill'd," she replied.
"I come to fulfil it."
He sprang from the place
Where he sat, press'd his hand, as in doubt, o'er his face;
And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the sound
Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would 'light
Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand laid
On her shoulder in silence; bent o'er her his head,
Search'd her face with a long look of troubled appeal

Against doubt; stagger'd backward, and murmur'd . . . "Lucile!
Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . thus?"
"Soul to soul, ay, Eugène,
As I pledged you my word that we should meet again.
Dead, . . ." she murmur'd, "long dead! all that lived in our lives —
Thine and mine — saving that which ev'n life's self survives,
The soul! 'T is my soul seeks thine own. What may reach
From my life to thy life (so wide each from each!)
Save the soul to the soul? To thy soul I would speak.
May I do so?"
He said (work'd and white was his cheek
As he raised it), "Speak to me!"
Deep, tender, serene,
And sad was the gaze which the Sœur Seraphine
Held on him. She spoke.

XXIII.

As some minstrel may fling,
Preluding the music yet mute in each string,
A swift hand athwart the hush'd heart of the whole,
Seeking which note most fitly may first move the soul;
And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,
Move pathetic in numbers remote; — even so
The voice which was moving the heart of that man
Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,
Far away in the pathos remote of the past;
Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,
Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that were gone
Unaccomplish'd from life.
He was mute.

XXIV.

She went on.
And still further down the dim past did she lead
Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed

'Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,
And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flower'd slope
Of life's dawning land!
'T is the heart of a boy,
With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy!
The unproved desire — the unaim'd aspiration —
The deep conscious life that forestalls consummation;
With ever a flitting delight — one arm's length
In advance of the august inward impulse.
The strength
Of the spirit which troubles the seed in the sand
With the birth of the palm-tree! Let ages expand
The glorious creature! The ages lie shut
(Safe, see!) in the seed, at time's signal to put
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer on layer,
Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands broad in blue air.
So the palm in the palm-seed! so, slowly — so, wrought
Year by year unperceived, hope on hope, thought by thought,
Trace the growth of the man from its germ in the boy.
Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also destroy!
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some chance intervene!
While the leaf 's in the bud, while the stem 's in the green,
A light bird bends the branch, a light breeze breaks the bough,
Which, if spared by the light breeze, the light bird, may grow
To baffle the tempest, and rock the high nest,
And take both the bird and the breeze to its breast.
Shall we save a whole forest in sparing one seed?
Save the man in the boy? in the thought save the deed?
Let the whirlwind uproot the grown tree, if it can!
Save the seed from the north wind. So let the grown man
Face out fate. Spare the man-seed in youth.
He was dumb
She went one step further.

XXV.

Lo! manhood is come.
And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown to the tree,

And the whirlwind comes after. Now prove we, and see:
What shade from the leaf? what support from the branch?
Spreads the leaf broad and fair? holds the bough strong and
stanch?
There, he saw himself — dark, as he stood on that night,
The last when they met and they parted: a sight
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to rejoice!
An ineffable tenderness troubled her voice;
It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.
Then he said
(Never looking at her, never lifting his head,
As though, at his feet, there lay visibly hurl'd
Those fragments), "It was not a love, 't was a world,
'T was a life that lay ruin'd, Lucile!"

XXVI.

She went on
"So be it! Perish Babel, arise Babylon!
From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,
And to build up the future heaven shatters the past."
"Ay," he moodily murmur'd, "and who cares to scan
The heart's perish'd world, if the world gains a man?
From the past to the present, though late, I appeal;
To the nun Seraphine, from the woman Lucile!"

XXVII.

Lucile! . . . the old name — the old self! silenced long:
Heard once more! felt once more!
As some soul to the throng
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized
By death to a new name and nature — surprised
'Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears faintly, and far,
Some voice from the earth, left below a dim star,
Calling to her forlornly; and (sadd'ning the psalms

Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise palms !)
The name borne 'mid earthly belovéds on earth
Sigh'd above some lone grave in the land of her birth ; —
So that one word . . . Lucile ! . . . stirr'd the Sœur Seraphine,
For a moment. Anon she resumed her serene
And concentrated calm.
" Let the Nun, then, retrace
The life of the soldier ! " . . . she said, with a face
That glow'd, gladdening her words.
" To the present I come :
" Leave the Past ! "
There her voice rose, and seem'd as when some
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple the praise
Of the hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.
Step by step did she follow his path from the place
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year did she trace
(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's existence.
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance ;
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours :
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same strife,
Waged alike to the limits of each human life.
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,
Shut up in his lone moody halls : every word
Held the weight of a tear : she recorded the good
He had patiently wrought through a whole neighborhood ;
And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's door.
There she paused : and her accents seem'd dipp'd in the hue
Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's wages,
Yet working love's work ; reading backwards life's pages
For penance ; and stubbornly, many a time,
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.
Then she spoke of the soldier ! . . . the man's work and fame,
The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim !
Life's inward approval !

XXVIII.

Her voice reach'd his heart,
And sank lower. She spoke of herself: how, apart
And unseen, — far away, — she had watch'd, year by year,
With how many a blessing, how many a tear,
And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife ·
Guess'd the thought in the deed: traced the love in the life:
Bless'd the man in the man's work!
"*Thy* work . . . oh not mine!
Thine, Lucile!" . . . he exclaim'd . . . "all the worth of it thine
If worth there be in it!"
Her answer convey'd
His reward, and her own: joy that cannot be said
Alone by the voice . . . eyes — face — spoke silently:
All the woman, one grateful emotion!
And she
A poor Sister of Charity! hers a life spent
In one silent effort for others! . . .
She bent
Her divine face above him, and fill'd up his heart
With the look that glow'd from it.
Then slow, with soft art,
Fix'd her aim, and moved to it.

XXIX.

He, the soldier humane,
He, the hero; whose heart hid in glory the pain
Of a youth disappointed; whose life had made known
The value of man's life! . . . that youth overthrown
And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth
In another? his own life of strenuous truth
Accomplish'd in act, had it taught him no care
For the life of another? . . . oh no! everywhere
In the camp which she moved through, she came face to face

With some noble token, some generous trace
Of his active humanity . . .
" Well," he replied,
" If it be so ?"
" I come from the solemn bedside
Of a man that is dying," she said. " While we speak,
A life is in jeopardy."
" Quick then ! you seek
Aid or medicine, or what ? "
" 'T is not needed," she said.
" Medicine ? yes, for the mind ! 'T is a heart that needs aid !
You, Eugène de Luvois, you (and you only) can
Save the life of this man. Will you save it ? "
" What man ?
How ? . . . where ? . . . can you ask ? "
She went rapidly on
To her object in brief vivid words . . . The young son
Of Matilda and Alfred — the boy lying there
Half a mile from that tent door — the father's despair,
The mother's deep anguish — the pride of the boy
In the father — the father's one hope and one joy
In the son : — the son now — wounded, dying ! She told
Of the father's stern struggle with life : the boy's bold,
Pure, and beautiful nature : the fair life before him
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might restore him!
The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugène !
Its pathos : the girl's love for him ; how, half slain
In his tent she had found him : won from him the tale ;
Sought to nurse back his life ; found her efforts still fail ;
Beaten back by a love that was stronger than life ;
Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife
Wherein England and France in their best blood, at last,
Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the past.
And shall nations be nobler than men ? Are not great
Men the models of nations ? For what is a state
But the many's confused imitation of one ?
Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance

An innocent life, — here, when England and France
Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent gore?
She went on to tell how the boy had clung still
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until
From his weak hands the strong effort dropp'd, stricken down
By the news that the heart of Constance, like his own,
Was breaking beneath . . .
But there "Hold!" he exclaim'd,
Interrupting, "forbear!" . . . . his whole face was inflamed
With the heart's swarthy thunder which yet, while she spoke,
Had been gathering silent — at last the storm broke
In grief or in wrath. . . .
"'T is to him, then," he cried, . .
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,
"That I owe these late greetings — for him you are here —
For his sake you seek me — for him, it is clear,
You have deign'd at the last to bethink you again
Of this long forgotten existence!"
"Eugène!"
"Ha! fool that I was!" . . . he went on, . . . "and just now
While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to grow
Almost boyish again, almost sure of *one* friend!
Yet this was the meaning of all — this the end!
Be it so! There 's a sort of slow justice (admit!)
In this — that the word that man's finger hath writ
In fire on my heart, I return him at last.
Let him learn that word — Never!"
"Ah, still to the past
Must the present be vassal?" she said. "In the hour
We last parted I urged you to put forth the power
Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.
Yours, the promise to strive: mine, — to watch o'er the strife.
I foresaw you would conquer; you *have* conquer'd much,
Much, indeed, that is noble! I hail it as such,
And am here to record and applaud it. I saw
Not the less in your nature, Eugène de Luvois,
One peril — one point where I fear'd you would fail

To subdue that worst foe which a man can assail, —
Himself: and I promised that, if I should see
My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,
That moment would bring me again to his side.
That moment is come! for that peril was pride,
And you falter. I plead for yourself, and one other,
For that gentle child without father or mother,
To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of France,
For your own nobler nature — and plead for Constance!"
At the sound of that name he averted his head.
"Constance! . . . . Ay, she enter'd my lone life" (he said)
"When its sun was long set; and hung over its night
Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,
In the midst of much darkness! Who names me but she
With titles of love? and what rests there for me
In the silence of age save the voice of that child?
The child of my own better life, undefiled!
My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts!"
"Say,"
Said the Sœur Seraphine — "are you able to lay
Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man
And swear that, whatever may happen, you can
Feel assured for the life you thus cherish?"
"How so?"
He look'd up. "If the boy should die thus?"
"Yes, I know
What your look would imply . . . this sleek stranger forsooth!
Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth
The heart of my niece must break for it!"
She cried,
"Nay, but hear me yet further!"
With slow heavy stride,
Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,
He was muttering low to himself as he went.
"Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just so long
As their wings are in growing; and when these are strong
They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!" . . .
The nun

Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmur'd, "The sun
Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! oh, yet
Let this day upon one final victory set,
And complete a life's conquest!"
He said, "Understand!
If Constance wed the son of this man, by whose hand
My heart hath been robb'd, she is lost to my life!
Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the wife
Of that man's son the child of my age? At her side
Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the bride
Of . . . enough!
"Ah, and you immemorial halls
Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet falls
On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,
Present, — all, in one silence! old trees to the blast
Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,
Nevermore, nevermore in the wild bosky ways
Shall I hear through your umbrage ancestral the wind
Prophesy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind
Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far years
Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with tears!
Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone
Rouse your echoes?"
"O think not," she said, "of the son
Of the man whom unjustly you hate; only think
Of this young human creature, that cries from the brink
Of a grave to your mercy!
"Recall your own words
(Words my memory mournfully ever records!)
How with love may be wreck'd a whole life! then, Eugène,
Look with me (still those words in our ears!) once again
At this young soldier sinking from life here — dragg'd down
By the weight of the love in his heart: no renown,
No fame comforts *him!* nations shout not above
The lone grave down to which he is bearing the love
Which life has rejected! Will *you* stand apart?
You, with such a love's memory deep in your heart!
You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led on

Through the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it hath won,
By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,
Such as lies at your door now: who have but, in truth,
To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,
And by that word you rescue a life!"
He was stirr'd.
Still he sought to put from him the cup; bow'd his face
On his hand; and anon, as though wishing to chase
With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,
He sprang up, brush'd past her, and bitterly cried,
"No! — Constance wed a Vargrave! — I cannot consent!"
Then up rose the Sœur Seraphine.
The low tent,
In her sudden uprising, seem'd dwarf'd by the height
From which those imperial eyes pour'd the light
Of their deep silent sadness upon him.
No wonder
He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under
The compulsion of that grave regard! For between
The Duc de Luvois and the Sœur Seraphine
At that moment there rose all the height of one soul
O'er another; she look'd down on him from the whole
Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and days,
There were long months and years in that heart-searching gaze;
And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos thrill'd through
And transfix'd him.
"Eugène de Luvois, but for you,
I might have been now — not this wandering nun,
But a mother, a wife — pleading, not for the son
Of another, but blessing some child of my own,
His, — the man's that I once loved! . . . Hush! that which is done
I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That 's best
Which God sends. 'T was His will: it is mine. And the rest
Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads
In your heart — He that judges of all thoughts and deeds,
With eyes, mine forestall not! This only I say:

You have not the right (read it, you, as you may!)
To say . . . 'I am the wrong'd.'" . . .
"Have I wrong'd thee? — wrong'd *thee!*"
He falter'd, "Lucile, ah, Lucile!"
"Nay, not me,"
She murmur'd, "but man! The lone nun standing here
Has no claim upon earth, and is pass'd from the sphere
Of earth's wrongs and earth's reparations. But she,
The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in me,
Demands from her grave reparation to man,
Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you can
This voice from the grave!"
"Hush!" he moan'd, "I obey
The Sœur Seraphine. There, Lucile! let this pay
Every debt that is due to that grave. Now lead on:
I follow you, Sœur Seraphine! . . . To the son
Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then," . . .
As he spoke
He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke
Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries crown'd,
Of the city beneath them . . .
"Then, *there*, underground,
And *valete et plaudite*, soon as may be!
Let the old tree go down to the earth — the old tree,
With the worm at its heart! Lay the axe to the root!
Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young shoot?
A Vargrave! . . . this pays all . . . . Lead on! . . . . In the seed
Save the forest! . . .
I follow . . . forth, forth! where you lead."

XXX.

The day was declining; a day sick and damp.
In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly camp
Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting

Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely flitting,
Cross'd the silence between him and death, which seem'd near.
— "Pain o'erreaches itself, so is balk'd! else, how bear
This intense and intolerable solitude,
With its eye on my heart and its hand on my blood?
Pulse by pulse! Day goes down: yet she comes not again.
Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more plain,
Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange! and scarcely feel sad.
Oh, to think of Constance *thus*, and not to go mad!
But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his own
Dull doings . . ."

XXXI.

Between those sick eyes and the sun
A shadow fell thwart.

XXXII.

'T is the pale nun once more!
But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the door?
How oft had he watch'd through the glory and gloom
Of the battle, with long, longing looks that dim plume
Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook, stoop'd
To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was loop'd!
How that stern face had haunted and hover'd about
The dreams it still scared! through what fond fear and doubt
Had the boy yearn'd in heart to the hero! (What 's like
A boy's love for some famous man?) . . . Oh, to strike
A wild path through the battle, down striking perchance
Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of France,
And so fall in his glorious regard! . . . Oft, how oft
Had his heart flash'd this hope out, whilst watching aloft
The dim battle that plume dance and dart — never seen
So near till this moment! how eager to glean
Every stray word, dropp'd through the camp-babble in praise
Of his hero — each tale of old venturous days
In the desert! And now . . . could he speak out his heart
Face to face with that man ere he died!

XXXIII.

With a start
The sick soldier sprang up: the blood sprang up in him,
To his throat, and o'erthrew him: he reel'd back: a dim
Sanguine haze fill'd his eyes; in his ears rose the din
And rush, as of cataracts loosen'd within,
Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale nun
(Looking larger than life, where she stood in the sun)
Point to him and murmur, "Behold!" Then that plume
Seem'd to wave like a fire, and fade off in the gloom
Which momently put out the world.

XXXIV.

To his side
Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . . "Ah!" . . . he sigh'd,
"The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and those eyes,
All the mother's! The old things again!
"Do not rise.
You suffer, young man?"

THE BOY.

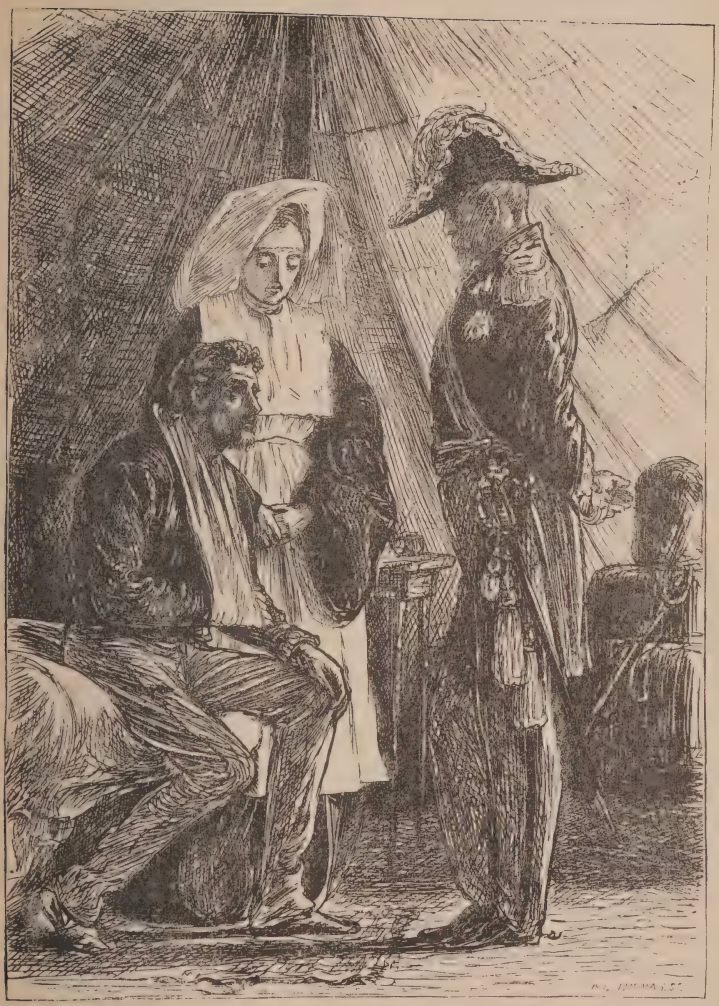
Sir, I die.

THE DUKE.

Not so young!

THE BOY.

So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among
The fray'd warp and woof of this brief life of mine
Other lives than my own. Could my death but untwine
The vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke, young — so young!
And I knew you not? yet I have done you a wrong
Irreparable! . . . late, too late to repair.
If I knew any means . . . but I know none! . . . I swear,
If this broken fraction of time could extend



"THE SICK SOLDIER SPRANG UP."

Into infinite lives of atonement, no end
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that be!)
To include it! Not too late, however, for me
To entreat: is it too late for you to forgive?

THE DUKE.

You wrong — my forgiveness — explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live!
Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,
I falter! . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think
Should free my soul hence.
Ah! you could not surmise
That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, longing eyes
Were following you evermore (heeded not!)
While the battle was flowing between us: nor what
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went
With the wind and the rain, round and round your blind tent,
Persistent and wild as the wind and the rain,
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain!
Oh, how obdurate then look'd your tent! The waste air
Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . "Off! he is there!"
I know not what merciful mystery now
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see lying low
Other footsteps (not those!) must soon bear to the grave.
But death is at hand, and the few words I have
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once.
Duke, I swear
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to hear!)
That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de Luvois,
I loved your niece — loved? why, I *love* her! I saw,
And, seeing, how could I but love her? I seem'd
Born to love her. Alas, were that all! Had I dream'd
Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now
Ever fearfully present before me, I vow
That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the tomb

Into which I descend . . . Oh why, whilst there was room
In life left for warning, had no one the heart
To warn me? Had any one whisper'd . . . "Depart!"
To the hope the whole world seem'd in league then to nurse!
Had any one hinted . . . "Beware of the curse
Which is coming!" There was not a voice raised to tell,
Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it fell,
And then . . . then the blow fell on *both!* This is why
I implore you to pardon that great injury
Wrought on her, and, through her, wrought on you, Heaven knows
How unwittingly!

THE DUKE.

Ah! . . and, young soldier, suppose
That I came here to seek, not grant, pardon?—

THE BOY.

Of whom?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb
No boyish resentment; not one lonely thought
That honors you not. In all this there is naught
'T is for me to forgive.
Every glorious act
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in your own.
And have I not hoarded, to ponder upon,
A hundred great acts from your life? Nay, all these,
Were they so many lying and false witnesses,
Does there rest not *one* voice, which was never untrue?
I believe in Constance, Duke, as she does in you!
In this great world around us, wherever we turn,
Some grief irremediable we discern;
And yet — there sits God, calm in Heaven above!

Do we trust one whit less in his justice or love ?
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough ! Hear at last, then, the truth.
Your father and I — foes we were in our youth.
It matters not why. Yet thus much understand :
The hope of my youth was sign'd out by his hand.
I was not of those whom the buffets of fate
Tame and teach : and my heart buried slain love in hate.
If your own frank young heart, yet unconscious of all
Which turns the heart's blood in its springtide to gall,
And unable to guess even aught that the furrow
Across these gray brows hides of sin or of sorrow,
Comprehends not the evil and grief of my life,
'T will at least comprehend how intense was the strife
Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby
I seek in the son of my youth's enemy
The friend of my age. Let the present release
Here acquitted the past ! In the name of my niece,
Whom for my life in yours as a hostage I give,
Are you great enough, boy, to forgive me, — and live ?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy
Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face of the boy :
As when some stormy moon, in a long cloud confined,
Struggles outward through shadows, the varying wind
Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised, from her prison,
So that slow joy grew clear in his face. He had risen
To answer the Duke ; but strength fail'd every limb ;
A strange, happy feebleness trembled through him.
With a faint cry of rapturous wonder, he sank
On the breast of the nun, who stood near.
" Yes, boy ! thank
This guardian angel," the Duke said. " I — you,
We owe all to her. Crown her work. Live ! be true
To your young life's fair promise, and live for her sake ! "
" Yes, Duke : I will live. I *must* live — live to make

My whole life the answer you claim," the boy said,
" For joy does not kill ! "
Back again the faint head
Declined on the nun's gentle bosom. She saw
His lips quiver, and motion'd the Duke to withdraw
And leave them a moment together.
He eyed
Them both with a wistful regard ; turn'd, and sigh'd,
And lifted the tent-door, and pass'd from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck up
On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,
Monstrous clouds, mass'd, misshapen, and ting'd with strange dyes,
Hover'd over the red fume, and changed to weird shapes
As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks, apes,
Chimeras, and hydras : whilst — ever the same —
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his flame,
And changed by his influence !) changeless, as when,
Ere he lit down to death generations of men,
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which there
With wild shapes this cloud-world seem'd to mimic in air,
The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone,
And shall shine on the ages we reach not — the sun !

XXXVI

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapors arise
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and revolve
Round the great central life, which is Love : these dissolve
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there terror ;
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,
And endless complexity, lasts but a while ;

Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile
Of God, on the soul, in the deep heart of Heaven
Lives changeless, unchanged : and our morning and even
Are earth's alternations, not Heaven's.

XXXVII.

While he yet
Watch'd the skies, with this thought in his heart ; while he set
Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,
Summ'd it up, search'd it out, proved it vapor and wind,
And embraced the new life which that hour had reveal'd, —
Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and conceal'd ;
Lucile left the tent and stood by him.
Her tread
Aroused him; and, turning towards her, he said :
" O Sœur Seraphine, are you happy ? "
" Eugène,
What is happier than to have hoped not in vain ? "
She answer'd, — " And you ? "
" Yes."
" You do not repent ? "
" No."
" Thank Heaven ! " she murmur'd. He musingly kept
His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart
Where he stood, sigh'd, as though to his innermost heart,
" O blessed are they, amongst whom I was not,
Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,
Predicts a pure evening ; who, sunlike, in light
Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set bright ! "

But she in response, " Mark yon ship far away,
Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,
With all its hush'd thunders shut up ! Would you know
A thought which came to me a few days ago,
Whilst watching those ships ? . . . When the great Ship of Life
Surviving, though shatter'd, the tumult and strife
Of earth's angry element, — masts broken short,

Decks drench'd, bulwarks beaten — drives safe into port,
When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,
Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand;
When, heeding no longer the sea's baffled roar,
The mariner turns to his rest evermore;
What will then be the answer the helmsman must give?
Will it be . . . 'Lo our log-book! Thus once did we live
In the zones of the South; thus we traversed the seas
Of the Orient; there dwelt with the Hesperides;
Thence follow'd the west wind; here, eastward we turn'd;
The stars fail'd us there; just here land we discern'd
On our lee; there the storm overtook us at last;
That day went the bowsprit, the next day the mast;
There the mermen came round us, and there we saw bask
A siren?' The Captain of Port will he ask
Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!
But . . . 'What is the last Bill of Health you can show?'
Not — How fared the soul through the trials she pass'd?
But — What is the state of that soul at the last?"

"May it be so!" he sigh'd. "There! the sun drops, behold!"
And indeed, whilst he spoke all the purple and gold
In the west had turn'd ashen, save one fading strip
Of light that yet gleam'd from the dark nether lip
Of a long reef of cloud; and o'er sullen ravines
And ridges the raw damps were hanging white screens
Of melancholy mist.
"*Nunc dimittis!*" she said.
"O God of the living! whilst yet 'mid the dead
And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days
Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,
In both these confirm us!
"The helmsman, Eugène,
Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always. Again
We two part: each to work out Heaven's will: you, I trust,
In the world's ample witness; and I, as I must,
In secret and silence: you, love, fame, await;
Me, sorrow and sickness. We meet at one gate

When all 's over. The ways they are many and wide,
And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side
May we stand at the same little door when all 's done!
The ways they are many, the end it is one.
He that knocketh shall enter: who asks shall obtain:
And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugène!"
She turn'd to depart.
"Whither? whither?" . . . he said.
She stretch'd forth her hand where, already outspread
On the darken'd horizon, remotely they saw
The French camp-fires kindling.
"O Duc de Luvois,
See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart
Made as one man's by one hope! That hope 't is your part
To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse:
Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sickness to nurse.
I go to my work: you to yours."

XXXVIII.

Whilst she spoke,
On the wide wasting evening there distantly broke
The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellow'd a gun.
"Our chasseurs are at it!" he mutter'd.
She turn'd,
Smiled, and pass'd up the twilight.
He faintly discern'd
Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky
Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists: by and by
The vapors closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplish'd, is o'er.
The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,
Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,
The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor

To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.
The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,
To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.
The mission of woman on earth! to give birth
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.
The mission of woman: permitted to bruise
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's register'd curse,
The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,
And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal
The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veil'd in cloud:
Yet still burning outward: a branch which, though bow'd
By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:
Through all symbols I search for her sweetness — in vain!
Judge her love by her life. For our life is but love
In act. Pure was hers: and the dear God above,
Who knows what His creatures have need of for life,
And whose love includes all loves, through much patient strife
Led her soul into peace. Love, though love may be given
In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven
More clearly she mirror'd, as life's troubled dream
Wore away; and love sigh'd into rest, like a stream
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the shore
Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its source
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
But what some land is gladden'd. No star ever rose
And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No life
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne
And gaze into the Face that makes glorious their own,

Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest sorrow,
Honest work for the day, honest hope for the morrow,
Are these worth nothing more than the hand they make weary,
The heart they have sadden'd, the life they leave dreary ?
Hush! the sevenfold heavens to the voice of the Spirit
Echo: He that o'ercometh shall all things inherit.

XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up through the fog ;
The loud fortress bark'd at her like a chain'd dog.
The horizon pulsed flame, the air sound. All without,
War and winter, and twilight, and terror, and doubt;
All within, light, warmth, calm!
In the twilight, longwhile
Eugène de Luvois with a deep, thoughtful smile
Linger'd, looking, and listening, lone by the tent.
At last he withdrew, and night closed as he went.

THE END.

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